

**Plurally Possessed:
Gift and Participation in the
Theo-ontology of John Milbank**

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Brendan Triffett

14th November, 2011

Feast of St. Gregory Palamas

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Abstract

In this thesis an attempt is made to strengthen and develop John Milbank's account of gift and participation, by way of encounters with other thinkers on gift (Jean-Luc Marion, Dietrich von Hildebrand), participation (James K.A. Smith, Thomas Aquinas), and transcendence (Catherine Keller, Mayra Rivera Rivera). The logic of the work is given in two moves made in the course of this dialogue, moves which concern grounds of possibility. First, it is argued that making sense of gift and participation requires a thought of the communicable or "plurally possessed". In respect to (i) gift, it is proposed that unless something remains really the same in the giver, even as it comes to abide in the recipient, such that it is actively present in both—without such communicative "doubling" of a self-identical principle ("Gift"), there can be no transcendence from one person to another, and therefore no event of gift. In respect to (ii) participation, it is shown that Milbank thinks the creature's *methexis* in divine being in terms of *processio*—the same divine life, originally proper to God, is also given to creatures in some way. Thus it seems that the intelligibility of (Milbank's) participation also depends on the idea of plural possession—that the latter is to be thought as the condition for both gift and *methexis*.

The second move complements the first; here the possibility of plural possession is itself questioned. A distinction is made between two senses of "proper", and thus between two ways of being a subject for something—metaphysically and dynamically/expressively. It is argued that the communicable is able to have plural *expressive* subjects, while remaining the Same (really one in its communicability) inasmuch as it has just one *metaphysical* subject. So in effect, the thesis suggests that taking account of this "propriological" distinction uniquely enables one to (a) provide the appropriate ontological basis for Milbank's "asymmetrical reciprocity" in gift-exchange, (b) uncover the specific features of his ontology of participation, and thus (c) better evaluate Milbank's thought.

However, Milbank's understanding of gift is still developing, and further research is needed on other aspects of his account of being and *methexis*. Also, more attention needs to be given to what the *gratuity* of gift might be, and how one might reconcile the (more Aristotelian) claim that creatures have created ontic forms, with the (more Platonic) claim that creatures have their being by bearing divine form as dynamical subjects.

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Abbreviations Used

- BR* John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003)
- PS* Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995)
- RONT* James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Toward a Post-Secular Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004)
- SCG* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*
- ST* Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*
- TST2* John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006)

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Tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo

St. Augustine, *Confessions* III, 6:11

1. Introduction

John Milbank, born in 1952 in London,¹ is the leading contemporary Anglo-Catholic theologian and currently Professor of Religion, Politics and Ethics at the University of Nottingham, where he is also the Director of the Centre of Theology and Philosophy.² His previous two posts were at the University of Virginia (most recently), and at the University of Cambridge. He studied at Oxford, Cambridge and Birmingham Universities. His work is metaphysical, in the sense that he attempts to re-interpret Being in terms of original peace, love, gift and Trinity.³ To this end he draws creatively upon various philosophers and theologians across the history of thought, including: Plato, Proclus, Augustine, Gregory of Nyssa, Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Cusa, Maurice Blondel, Henri de Lubac and Sergei Bulgakov. His interaction with recent developments or fashions in continental thought (e.g. Derrida, Deleuze, Badiou) is largely polemical and typically displays the following general pattern of argument: In order to avoid the problematic elements of postmodern nihilism, one must adopt and renew a Christianised Neoplatonic ontology or cosmology. In this fashion Milbank advocates a participatory ontology (Plato, Augustine, Aquinas), embraces the analogy of being and realism about universals (in both cases Aquinas is opposed to Duns Scotus), affirms the primacy of actuality (against the theological voluntarism of William of Ockham and the possibilism of Heidegger), affirms the unity of being, truth, goodness, beauty and also power (following but also critiquing Hans Urs von Balthasar) and thinks the

¹ Though of Scottish heritage; it has been said that this is evident in his uncompromising and polemical style of thought.

² <http://theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/>

³ See Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003), and his *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), especially the respective introductions.

world and human nature as always-already graced (de Lubac's reading of Aquinas⁴) and as embedded in the divine (John Scotus Eriugena, Bulgakov).

Milbank is best known as the leading figure associated with the “Radical Orthodoxy” movement.⁵ This theological movement is “radical” in the sense of returning to (i) the roots of Christian tradition in the Patristic period while (ii) drawing upon contemporary critical theory and continental thought to launch its polemic against “secularism.”⁶ Specifically, the Platonic notion of *methexis*, as rethought in Christian terms, is used to “out narrate” the opposition between, on one hand, epistemic foundationalism and the primacy of the subject, and on the other, a nihilism that thinks the infinite in terms of a formless sublime and/or destroys the subject altogether.⁷ Against secularising narratives and/or theories of pure immanence, it is claimed that the “suspension” (interruption, also enfolding) of the material (e.g. language, culture, sexuality, politics and friendship) in the divine, is what gives the material its depth and radiance and therefore its inherent goodness.⁸

⁴ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

⁵ See John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999) [henceforth *RONT*], especially the introduction. See also Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Graham Ward, *Cities of God* (London: Routledge, 2000). Developments at the Centre of Theology and Philosophy at the University of Nottingham demonstrate a movement away from strict identification with a particular “school” of thought, in favour of a network of overlapping intellectual interests and viewpoints.

⁶ *RONT*, 2-3. The theological turn recently made in French phenomenology is influential here, although Milbank is critical of the project of a *pure* phenomenology, and of Heideggerian assumptions about the need to overcome metaphysics altogether. See Dominique Janicaud, et. al, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000).

⁷ This approach is also represented in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), and beyond Radical Orthodoxy, in David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003). Influential in this regard is Hans Urs von Balthasar. See his, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, edited by Joseph Fessio, S.J. and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982). For an alternative, pro-Kantian approach to theological aesthetics, see Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁸ Critical introductions to Radical Orthodoxy are given in James K.A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Toward a Post-Secular Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004) and Steven Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction* (London: SPCK, 2007). Other volumes critical of Radical Orthodoxy are: Laurence Paul Hemming (ed.), *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001); Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (eds), *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005); James K.A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed*

As part of this project Milbank has attempted to rethink (1) human *poesis* as participation in the divine Logos,⁹ a project which takes up certain themes of his doctoral work on Giambattista Vico,¹⁰ and (2) gift-exchange as participation in divine Gift, the Holy Spirit,¹¹ against theories of gift which for him place too much emphasis on unilateral self-sacrifice. Milbank's goal in *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (first edition, 1990), the volume that gave him fame (and in some circles, infamy), was to show that "the secular" is not some "residue" left over after inevitable emancipation from theocentric cosmologies, but rather a construction that followed from certain theological developments in the (late) Middle Ages (the thought of Duns Scotus is said to be crucial). He attempts to show that various "secular" social theories are either Christian heresies or non-Christian theologies, and proposes that the Christian *mythos* alone, as grounded in Trinitarian being and harmony, is able to refuse an ontology of original strife. Thus Christian theology (or "theo-ontology") should not let itself be positioned by the claims and results of social theory.¹² For Milbank, in theo-ontology, revelation and theology situate and determine ontology, whereas in "onto-theology" God is subsumed under a general, pre-theological concept of Being.¹³

The two material foci of this thesis are "participation" and "gift". As already suggested, these are key, interconnected themes in Milbank's theo-ontology. According to this vision, since all creatures participate in God, all things are gifted with God or grace, and in that way are gifted

Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006). See also Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009). Another book, by Paul DeHart, will soon be published, critiquing Radical Orthodoxy's readings of Aquinas.

⁹ Milbank, *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

¹⁰ Milbank, *The Religious Dimensions in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744. Part 1. The Early Metaphysics* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991); *The Religious Dimensions in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744. Part 2. Language, Law and History* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992).

¹¹ See Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003) [henceforth, *BR*] esp. the introduction.

¹² The publication of *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990) provoked many critical responses. See Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), chapters 7 to 9, for Milbank's answer to many of these as well as appropriate references.

¹³ See Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," *New Blackfriars* 76 (1995), 325-42 [a revised version is included in *The Word Made Strange*, 36-52]; Milbank, "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics: On the Modalities of Terror" in Connor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler, Jr (eds), *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 452-499.

with being (and thus power, goodness, and beauty). To give and receive gifts is to participate in divine *Donum*. It is also to participate in the dynamism or “destining” of the material gift itself. For the latter is intrinsically givable; the giver does not impose her will to give but rather freely mediates the gift’s active tendency toward its recipient (here Milbank eschews explicitly the dichotomy between active personal subject and passive material object). Moreover, since gift-exchange and production are inseparable, to participate in gift is also to participate in divine *poesis* and thus in the Logos.¹⁴

For the sake of a broader perspective, it is worth indicating some of the other important motifs in the writings of John Milbank. These include: (i) “peace” (also harmony and proportion) as opposed to “strife” or “agonism”, (ii) what is perhaps the logical/intentional correlate of peace, “paradox” (thinking “opposed” elements of reality as complementary and mutually supporting, such as love-of-self and love-of-other, and presence and withdrawal) in place of “dialectic”,¹⁵ (iii) active reception in the “middle voice” (this designates the combination, or synthesis, of agency and passivity in the one subject in respect to the same act or event) which is an important manifestation of peace and application of “paradox”, and (iv) “non-identical repetition”.¹⁶ The latter is applied in different ways to the creative appropriation (in the middle voice) of (a) personal identity, (b) tradition¹⁷ and (c) more generally the event of truth (according to the paradox of presence and withdrawal)—and also to the circulation of gift(s).

In fact, in Milbank’s work there is a tight connection between “gift” and “participation” and the four other motifs just listed. Briefly: the event of *gift* is the event of reciprocity, and

¹⁴ See *BR*, introduction.

¹⁵ See Milbank, “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek” in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233.

¹⁶ See Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard” in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy*, 131-156.

¹⁷ See Milbank, “Enclaves, or Where is the Church?” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 133-44.

therefore an event of (i) peace. This event must be thought according to (ii) the paradox that synthesises love-of-self with love-of-other (otherwise one is left having to choose or “shuttle” between egoism and altruism), and the paradox that thinks presence and withdrawal together (otherwise one is left having to choose or shuttle between inert “givens” reduced to commodities and/or fully surveyable objects—and the undecidable, sublime and thus possibly sinister “gift” of the infinite). Such paradoxes are possible because of (iv) the non-identical repetition of personal identity, and of gift, and this in (iii) the middle voice. As for Milbank’s ontology of *participation*, this promises to affirm (i) original peace between creatures, and between creation and God, or in other words to allow for (ii) the paradox of the love-of-self coinciding with love-of-God (and therefore with love-of-others), and also the paradox of presence/withdrawal in things which somehow “obscurely suggest” the divine; these are thought according to (iv) the event of truth and gift as this is non-identically repeated, always in (iii) the middle voice.

1.1. Strengthening Milbank’s Position by Questioning the Communicable

In this thesis an attempt is made to develop and strengthen Milbank’s theo-ontology at its centre, by questioning “gift” and “participation”, in connection with the other motifs just mentioned (peace, paradox, active reception, non-identical repetition). The overall argument has two stages. First, it is claimed that making sense of gift and participation, at least as they figure in Milbank’s thought, ultimately requires one to think in terms of the *communicable* or the *plurally possessed*. Second, it is claimed that this calls for a particular distinction: that between (a) ontic or metaphysical possession and (b) expressive or dynamical possession. Taken from the side of that which is possessed, this is a distinction between two senses of being “in” a subject, or of being “proper to” a subject, hence it is called the *propriological distinction*. The rationale and significance of these two stages of the argument need

explanation, of course, along with the propriological distinction, and the meaning of plural possession.

Consider some active principle P whose immanence in an individual subject S in some way empowers S. Suppose one takes P to be an expressible “force” that is enfolded in S as an ontic component or metaphysical part of S, on account of which S is a monadic *agent*.¹⁸ On this view force does not subsist. So P has existence just because it inheres in or is “said of” S, where this inherence or being-of is *exclusive* to S, such that it is metaphysically impossible for the same P to have other subjects also. On this understanding, as soon as we *do* speak of there being the “same” force that occurs in one individual subject and also in another, we are no longer speaking of an entity or principle that is *really* the same across these two occurrences. We have moved from the realm of the real and concrete, to the realm of what is *merely thought*. On this view, just as there is no Humanity that circulates and becomes actively present in each human person, there is no self-same Force that spans difference by circulating between individuals, only various instances of an abstract type called “force”.

Now the mode of immanence of P in S on the above picture is, by my definition, the “ontic” or “metaphysical” mode. This way of being-in-S establishes P in existence to begin with (it saves P from being “merely an abstraction”) *and thereby limits its extension to S alone*. To repeat, on this view of P, once P or “force” *is* said to have extension beyond S in particular, “force” (or P) comes to signify an abstract type, a merely logical entity—certainly not an active principle circulating through things in the real world. At this point one can ask: How might some entity or principle yet to be specified, come to have an extension *transcending* just one particular, and yet—in contrast to “force” in the previous sentence—still be *real*, having innate force, remaining concretely identical to itself even as it circulates? The logic of

¹⁸ This is the Leibnizian view adopted by James K.A. Smith. See chapter 5.

the thesis is grasped once this question is understood, along with what *motivates* it, and the *response* that is given to it.

The motivation for the question and the question itself are given in “stage one” of the thesis. The problem raised above can be put appropriately in terms of gift-giving: How might something remain proper to the giver while becoming proper to the recipient also, such that it is wholly and actively present in both? The *motivation* behind this line of questioning is that such sharing or “doubling” seems to be essential to the event of gift, to be the life of interpersonal union, and thus the “soul” of gift-exchange. For surely, if the active principle P expressed by a particular giver S in his act of giving—if a more concrete picture is needed, imagine P to be the spirit of love animating a giver in his gift-giving—if P could have no subject other than S, *then the expressive actuality of P to which P tends would be reducible to the actuality and fulfilment of S as an individual*. But in that case S would neither give for the sake of the recipient, nor acknowledge and mirror the intrinsic worth of the recipient in his act of giving. There would occur teleological self-fulfilment and self-affirmation, but no event of gift. It would seem, then, that gift-giving must consist in the individual giver’s expressive mediation of some *communicable* entity—one might call this Love, Spirit or Gift (the capitals emphasise communicability). From here, it is not too difficult to entertain the thought that the communicable is what circulates invisibly in gift-exchange, drawing different participants in gift-exchange into communion as they each mediate its expressible potential in turn (these arguments are made in chapters 3 and 4).

Such, at least, is the import of stage one of the overall argument. The idea of a gift-exchange that involves true generosity and loving transcendence toward the other, appears to call for a thought of the communicable. So too does Milbank’s ontology of participation, in which God *gifts* creatures with his own being or life, in some way and to some extent, in order that they be. The Neoplatonic themes of *processio* and indwelling which Milbank invokes here clearly

involve a thought of “doubling”, of plural possession (this is shown in chapter 5). But this still leaves us with the question raised above: How might some entity or principle come to have an extension beyond just one particular, and yet still be real, having innate force, remaining concretely identical to itself even as it circulates? This leads us into stage two of the argument (the *response* to the central question).

Clearly, another mode of being-in must be found for the communicable (assuming there is such an entity), given that its “ontic” or “metaphysical” subject is unique by definition. If the extension of an active principle P is to be greater than one, or at least *able* to be greater than one, then “the extension of P” cannot be restricted in its sense such that it always means “the sum of *metaphysical* subjects for P.” Now a promising *other* sense of being-a-subject, first offered in chapter 5, has to do with dynamism and expression. A *dynamical* subject for P is on this account an individual agent which has command over P, dictating if and when P comes into act, such that the act of P is necessarily the same event as the act of this subject S. The same idea is also put as follows: an *expressive* subject for P is a mediator which has command over the expression of P. P, as a centre of expressible force or power or virtuality, does not simply come into expression “of its own accord”, but only as long as S brings or releases P into expression.

This specific proposal represents the extreme point of our penetration into the grounds of possibility of gift and participation (it is developed in more detail in chapters 6 and 7). If the *metaphysical* extension of some empowering and expressible principle P is necessarily restricted to just one, then the *dynamical* or *expressive* extension of P is *not* so restricted. Thus what is opened to view is the possibility that P is communicable, able to be plurally possessed while remaining the Same P. Again, the propriological distinction allows one to say that a real entity can be plurally possessed by its *expressive* subjects, while remaining really one (the “Same”) inasmuch as it has just one *metaphysical* subject. The capitalization

of “Same” and “Gift” is used in this work to denote an entity which is really one in this special sense, a sense which accommodates a certain non-locality or multiple inherence. Such an entity would not be a particular being or individual agent in any straight-forward sense, yet that is not to say that it is merely a being of reason, existing as one only in the mind.¹⁹

An Aristotelian Objection

Before considering the relevant literature, it is worth responding to an objection; this will clarify further the rationale and method of the thesis, at the risk of a little repetition. As just explained, the ontological “key” pursued in this work for the sake of strengthening Milbank’s theology, is a peculiar manner of self-unity which is *real*—where this implies having innate virtuality, being an active principle—and yet which is not reducible to the self-unity of the *individual* agent. But one might wonder what value this notion of Sameness has for us, and so have doubts still about the rationale of the thesis. Why not settle for the Aristotelian understanding of universals? On this view, there are entities or principles of being which *do* each have a metaphysical extension greater than one. For example, the *genus* “animal” has no real existence that is not reducible to its being the animality *of this animal here*, and *of that animal there*, and so on. Insofar as it is in existence, then, the universal has plural (metaphysical) subjects. Now this solution may well admit of entities or principles of being that have a metaphysical extension greater than one. It might be said that animality *as such* has many metaphysical subjects, even if the animality *of this animal here* has only one. But even if this proposition is acceptable in itself, what it does *not* accommodate is the plural extension of some entity or principle *which has real being intrinsically*. For Aristotle, *genus* (and any other universal, for that matter), when considered in itself, has no real existence at

¹⁹ Technically, “Same” is sometimes used as an adjective also: Gift is the Same (as itself) even as it circulates through multiple participants in gift-exchange.

all; it is merely a “being of reason”. Here plural extension is granted to the universal at the cost of effectively denying it real being.²⁰

The problem with this result, is that it does not seem to accommodate the idea of an active principle which, by being in a particular subject, empowers that subject to act in accordance with a truly “ecstatic” and relational dynamism. In other words, the denial of real being to *all* universals would appear to make each individual agent naturally “curved upon itself”, tending simply toward its *own* good, its *own* actuality, its *own* perfection and fruition. The individual agent could not mediate and bring into expression the dynamism of some indwelling “other”; it could only enact and express itself, or a moment or part of itself. A universal which has no expressible potential in itself (since it has no real being in itself) could not take particulars up in a *general* movement—a motion originating from, and returning to, some non-individual principle, some transcendent term or object, some non-local ground (i.e. the communicable).

If we approach the universal in an Aristotelian frame of mind, it can be considered either in itself or in things (*in re*). But considered in itself, the universal has (for Aristotle) no real being, which implies that it cannot be the ground of any (circular) dynamism. And considered in union with a particular (metaphysical) subject—as a component or property *of an individual being*—the universal may well be real and even dynamic, but (for Aristotle) it is tied strictly to just one thing. But this means that the universal brings nothing to its (metaphysical) subject that would involve it in a *general* movement as just explained. This problematic result seems to follow from the Aristotelian dichotomy between *real being which is fully particular*, and *universal being which is merely logical*. Thus the subject’s self-expression would be *merely* self-expression, whereas on Milbank’s view, the reality of gift

²⁰ For references to Aristotle and Aquinas on this issue see §5.3.1.

and participation make possible *poesis*: an “inspired” mode of self-expression which coincides with the (mediated) self-expression of some indwelling “other”, some communicable virtuality. *This* expressive act has as its object and goal, not some state of actuality and fruition of the individual—or at least not that *primarily*—but rather an event that transcends individuals, gathering them together in a unity that respects and affirms difference. According to the thesis, this is the event *of the communicable*, an event which arises from the virtuality of the communicable, and this always through the expressive mediation of plural participants. With this vision of things (it is claimed), the spirit of Milbank’s theology of gift and participation is captured, and its basic logic uncovered. Note, however, that this is not a thesis on universals as such. Nor is it intended to be a treatise on the problem of the One and the Many.

1.2. Relevant Literature

Robyn Horner has questioned whether Milbank’s exchange account of gift, in which gift “returns” albeit with “delay and difference”, manages to avoid absorbing the gift into the non-gratuitous horizon of “economy” (as per the critique of Jean-Luc Marion).²¹ By contrast, Catherine Keller finds that Milbank does not think “reciprocity” in gift-exchange radically enough, insofar as he reads the relation between God and world in unilateralist terms (God as immutable giver, creation as pure recipient).²² Sarah Coakley’s critical comments focus on the particular way in which the “feminine”, in the form of divine Gift and Holy Spirit, is included in Milbank’s Trinity.²³ Comparisons have also been made between Milbank’s

²¹ Robyn Horner *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 17-18.

²² Catherine Keller, “Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank’s *Being Reconciled*” in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 18-35.

²³ Sarah Coakley, “Why Gift? Gift, Gender and Trinitarian Relations in Milbank and Tanner”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61 (2008), 224-235.

understanding of gift and Calvin’s theology of grace,²⁴ and between the compatibility of divine command and gift according to Karl Barth, and their incompatibility according to Milbank.²⁵ In relation to this thesis, the most pertinent reference to Milbank’s account of gift is made in Mark Manilopoulos, *If Creation is a Gift*.²⁶ Manilopoulos proposes an irreducibly “aporetic” approach to gift in order to do justice to its moments of reciprocity *and* to its moments of unilateral gratuity/expenditure. This contrasts with Milbank’s “paradoxical” approach, in which love-of-self and love-of-other are *not* seen to be opposed from the beginning. Manilopoulos does not consider the possibility that *aporia* appears to be essential to the gift, and to its philosophical concept and expression, only if one has not transcended the perspective of the atomic individual in favour of the mediated universal, the plurally expressible Same, or communicable Gift.²⁷ In fact, none of the few existing responses to Milbank’s account of gift approach that account from this perspective—let alone by making use of the “propriological distinction” proposed in this thesis.²⁸

The responses in the literature to Milbank’s theological use of “participation” are of three types. *First*, there are those included in the objections to Milbank’s reading of Aquinas; these are made in response to *Truth in Aquinas* (2001) by Milbank and Pickstock.²⁹ John Marenbon points out that Aquinas’s claim that human reason participates in divine reason merely affirms that created intellects *imitate* divine intellect, according to a certain *similitude*. This is

²⁴ J. Todd Billing, “John Milbank’s Theology of the ‘Gift’ and Calvin’s Theology of Grace: A Critical Comparison”, *Modern Theology* 21 (2005), 87-105.

²⁵ Chris K. Huebner, “Can a Gift Be Commanded? Theological Ethics without Theory by Way of Barth, Milbank and Yoder”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000), 472-489.

²⁶ Mark Manilopoulos, *If Creation is a Gift* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009).

²⁷ See also Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Hegel would say that *aporia* is a function of *Verstand* and/or *Vernunft*, the stages of thought that precede speculative reason. The latter “apprehends the unity of terms (propositions) in their opposition—the affirmative, which is involved in their disintegration and in their transition.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, trans. W. Wallace with introduction by A.V. Miller (Oxford, Clarendon, 1975), §82 (see also §§80-81). Cf. Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 242-44.

²⁸ A few summary comments on “gift” are made in Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction*, 97-99. Mary-Jane Rubinstein, “Relationality: The Gift After Ontotheology”, *Telos* 123 (2002), 65-80, merely explains Milbank’s theological use of “gift”.

²⁹ John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001).

different from saying, as Milbank does in his retrieval of Aquinas, that divine intellect or substance indwells the human intellect, endowing the latter with divine light or divine reason, albeit according to the limitations of the receiver.³⁰ Aquinas associates this mode of divine indwelling exclusively with final beatitude, as Paul DeHart points out. For DeHart, Milbank's misreading of Aquinas's analogy of being in terms of an inchoate intuition of divine being, is a function of Milbank's fiercely anti-Kantian approach to Aquinas.³¹ It has also been claimed that Milbank's reading of universal "participation in God" confuses the orders of nature and grace where Aquinas does not.³² *Second*, there are the objections made from the Dutch Reformed tradition. According to James K.A. Smith, Milbank's ontology of participation is incompatible with an affirmation of the intrinsic being and goodness of creatures.³³ Michael Horton recommends a theology of "covenant" rather than an ontology of participation; for him this allows for the gratuity and novelty of salvation in Christ, and properly affirms the distinctness of created persons relative to God.³⁴ *Third*, the feminist objections in *Interpreting the Postmodern* take issue with the way in which Milbank upholds divine transcendence. On their view, to say that the world and human persons participate in transcendence, is to devalue the immanent world, and also to fail to uphold the intrinsic value of human persons and relations.³⁵ However, none of these responses questions "participation" at length and in

³⁰ John Marenbon, "Aquinas, Radical Orthodoxy and the Importance of Truth" in Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (eds), *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*, 49-64.

³¹ Paul DeHart, "On Being Heard But Not Seen: Milbank and Lash on Aquinas, Analogy and Agnosticism", *Modern Theology* 26 (2010), 243-77. See also Nicholas Lash, "Where Does Holy Teaching Leave Philosophy? Questions on Milbank's Aquinas", *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 433-444.

³² Michael Mawson, "Understandings of Nature and Grace in John Milbank and Thomas Aquinas", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009), 347-61.

³³ James K.A. Smith, "Will the Real Plato Please Stand Up?: Participation versus Incarnation" in James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 61-72; *ibid.*, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy* (see chapter 5 below).

³⁴ Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007); *ibid.*, "Participation and Covenant" in James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition*, 107-130. A similar objection is also made in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³⁵ See esp. Catherine Keller, "Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank's *Being Reconciled*" in Ruether and Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"*, 18-35; Mayra Rivera Rivera "Radical Transcendence? Divine and Human Otherness in Radical Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology" in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 119-138;

terms of the communicable or the plurally possessed, or applies anything like the propriological distinction as developed below.³⁶

1.3. Outline

In terms of its *foci*, the thesis is divided up as follows. Chapters 2 to 4 focus on gift, while chapters 5 to 8 focus on participation. As for the *two stages of the overall argument*, chapter 2 prepares the ground for chapters 3 and 4, and these argue that gift-exchange is best thought in terms of the mediation of the communicable. The corresponding argument for the condition of participation is made in chapter 5, thus completing the first stage of the argument for both foci. In chapters 5 to 7 the propriological distinction is proposed and developed in order to account for the being of the communicable, completing the second stage of the argument. Chapter 8 is not strictly included in the overall argument, but is an application of its result.

The contents of each chapter will now be laid out in some more detail. In chapter 2, “Reciprocity and Paradox”, Milbank’s account of gift-exchange is explained in its theological context, and the “paradoxical” logic at work in this account is contrasted with the “dialectical” logic underlying the unilateralist account(s) of gift to which Milbank objects. For unilateralist accounts of gift (Derrida, Marion), it is deeply problematic to situate philosophically the event of gift or givenness in the horizon of reciprocity (gift-exchange). This is precisely what Milbank does, but he disarms unilateralist objections by proposing a

Marion Grau, “‘We Must Give Ourselves to Voyaging’: Regifting the Theological Present” in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 141-60.

³⁶ A few general comments on participation are included in Shakespeare, *Radical Orthodoxy: A Critical Introduction*, 170-71. Wayne Hankey makes some critical comments on Milbank’s appropriation of Neoplatonism. See Wayne J. Hankey, “Philosophical Religion and the Neoplatonic Turn to the Subject” in Hankey and Hedley (eds), *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*, 17-30; *ibid.*, “Theoria Versus Poesis: Neoplatonism and Trinitarian Difference in Aquinas, John Milbank, Jean-Luc Marion and John Zizioulas”, *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 387-415. However, these responses do not touch upon *methexis* directly. They concern the place of *theoria* and interiority/subjectivity in Neoplatonism, which Milbank supposedly downplays (he is said to be influenced by Heidegger in this respect).

narrative of *paradox* in place of a dialectical one. Generosity in gift-giving appears to be incompatible with any form of gain (counter-gift, society, gratitude) only if it assumed that love-of-self and love-of-other are dialectically opposed tendencies. The appearance and recognition of gift seem to be incompatible with the gratuity and unpredictability of gift only if it is assumed that presence and withdrawal are dialectically opposite. In contrast, Milbank proposes a synthesis of presence and withdrawal (phenomena are given insofar as they also withdraw from view) and a coincidence of love-of-self and love-of-other (the true self that is to be loved in self-love is the self that loves the other, in God).

This prepares the way for the *first* stage of the argument proper. In chapter 3, “Gift and Shared Agency”, the condition of possibility for Milbank’s “society in gift-exchange” is questioned. An attempt is made to account for the emergence of unity (in difference/distance) between participants in gift-exchange, in terms of the sharing or circulation of a communicable entity, “Gift”. This proposal is developed further in chapter 4, “The Ontology of Gift”. Several objections and weaknesses are addressed here, and the “paradoxical teleology” of Gift is explained. The event of Gift is one that, of its essence, is mediated in the plural, just as the event of dialogue needs plural participants. If communicable Gift tends towards its expressive actuality, it does so in accordance with the *manner* of its actualisation, and therefore by circulating for the sake of its plural expression (the mode in which the event of Gift continues through time).

In chapter 5, “Two Senses of Proper”, *participation* comes to the fore. The propriological distinction is explicitly introduced, thus initiating a deepening of the proposed account of the communicable (stage *two* of the overall argument). “Proper” denotes a very intuitive and basic notion to do with *having*. For some perfection, form or power *P* to be “proper” to a subject *S* simply means that *P* is “of” *S*, and is possessed internally or immanently by *S* in some way, though this way is not yet specified. The propriological distinction specifies two

senses in which *P* can be understood to be proper to *S*—*dynamically* (where “*P* is proper to *S*” means something like “*S* determines if and when *P* comes into act/expression”) and *ontically* (where “*P* is proper to *S*” means “*P* is a component or part of *S*”). Using this distinction, (1) a response is made to the claim of James K.A. Smith that Milbank’s ontology of participation does not give creatures intrinsic power, being and goodness, (2) the specific features of Milbank’s ontology of participation are brought to light, particularly as that departs from the metaphysics of Aquinas in favour of divine self-diffusion and the enfolding of creation in divine Gift or “Sophia”, and (3) the difference that Milbank misses between two modes of Neoplatonism, is noted. On the more Aristotelian configuration of Neoplatonism/participation, the two senses of “proper” are bound strictly together; on the more Platonic configuration of Neoplatonism/participation, there is a propriological distinction and thus a notion of the communicable or plurally possessed.

In chapter 6, “Expressive Hypostasis”, the propriological distinction is worked out with more precision, by introducing the notions of “expressible virtuality”, “dynamising form” and “expressive hypostasis.” It is argued that, in order that an act take place, the agent (i.e. *dynamical* subject) does not add some extra power or act to its dynamising principle, but rather yields itself as the site or “expressive hypostasis” for that principle, as the latter rises into expressive act. In chapter 7, “Virtuality”, this account of dynamism is supplemented with an argument in favour of the absolute primacy of virtuality. Against Aristotle and Aquinas, it is claimed that virtuality is able to bring itself into expressive act (with the expressive subject’s concession). Thus stage two of the overall argument is completed.

Finally, in chapter 8, “Transcendence”, a response is made to some of the feminist objections to Milbank in *Interpreting the Postmodern*.³⁷ At this point the overall argument has already been made in its two phases. However, the contents of this chapter draw upon the results of those preceding it, and contribute to the evaluation of Milbank’s account of gift and participation. On the basis of the propriological distinction, it is argued that (a) Milbank does not oppose divine immanence and transcendence in the way that feminist theologians have recently declared, (b) Milbank’s claim that human persons abide in and repeat Christ is defensible against the objection to hierarchy that assumes that intrinsic being and goodness cannot be possessed by way of being-in-Another, and that (c) this Christological “paradox” promises to accommodate both the relationality and the separateness of human persons in a way that a non-Christological view cannot.³⁸

³⁷ Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to “Radical Orthodoxy”* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006).

³⁸ In this thesis “God” is referred to in the first person masculine singular (lower case), in accordance with Milbank’s usage. When referring to human persons in the abstract, I alternate between *he/him* and *she/her*.

2. Reciprocity and Paradox

2.1. Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on John Milbank's claim that the event of the gift should be thought in terms of reciprocity. A contrast is drawn between Milbank's ontology of gift and the unilateralism which it critiques, in terms of his distinction between "paradox" and "dialectic". This is to prepare for chapters 3 and 4, where Milbank's suggestions in favour of a synergetic or dialogical view of gift-giving will be appropriated and developed in a particular direction. There it will be argued that the condition of synergy and community in gift-exchange, is the plural expression through time of the Same communicable Gift.

First, Milbank's arguments against unilateralism are interpreted within the thematic horizon of an important chapter of *Being Reconciled*. The theme in question is the relation between Christianity and "moral luck" (the idea that our ability to act well is subject to fortune), and more specifically, the relation between grace and gift-exchange. Critical attention is given to the way in which Milbank associates *non-identical repetition*, or the returning and re-giving of different gifts, with *resurrection*, the renewal of the subject as it is surprisingly gifted with itself through time; and conversely, *unilateralism* (the non-return of gift) with "*inviolable*" *subjectivity* (the non-renewal of the subject). Here it will be necessary to distinguish (where Milbank does not) between his arguments for the *compatibility* of generosity and reciprocity, and those for the *necessity* of reciprocity in gift-giving. Both these aspects of Milbank's narrative are evaluated in light of Dietrich von Hildebrand's more subtle analyses of different expressions of love (e.g. love of neighbour versus marital love).

Second, Milbank's critique of the Kantian heritage of "postmodernism" is drawn upon, and related to his appropriation of the theologies of Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

An important difference is thus shown between (i) the way in which the arrival of the infinite is mediated to the subject according to Milbank's Anglo-Catholic paradigm, and (ii) the way in which that arrival is mediated according to a basically Lévinasian paradigm. In Milbank's view, the continual arrival of oneself as participant in gift, occurs *by way of* receptivity to others and to the radiant presence of things in the world. By contrast, a unilateralist reading of gift-giving *denies* this "horizontal inflection of time" and is trapped within a dialectical opposition of presence and absence, appropriation and expropriation. Hence, in view of some of his later essays, it is argued that Milbank's subversion of the unilateralist paradigm is a decision in favour of "paradox" (the original *synthesis* of presence-and-absence, and of appropriation-and-expropriation) as opposed to "dialectic".

2.2. Catherine Keller's Approval of Reciprocity in Milbank's *Being Reconciled*

This section introduces Milbank's ethics of reciprocity by way of some comments made by contemporary feminist theologian, Catherine Keller.¹ First, a word on Milbank's opposition to "unilateralist" accounts of gift. In various texts, including *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon*,² Milbank argues that the "repetition" of gift in a counter-gift, need not be seen as annulling the first gift, as long as such repetition is thought in an appropriate manner. This argument of Milbank's is a response to the unilateralism adopted by Jacques Derrida and by Jean-Luc Marion in different ways.³ To put it simply, for these two French authors, every form of "return" of a gift is against the meaning and spirit of the gift. For Derrida, a problematic return is already underway with the presence and recognition of the gift as such.

¹ Keller's criticisms are not dealt with until chapter 8.

² John Milbank, *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* (London: Routledge, 2003). Henceforth: *BR*.

³ For this difference see John D. Caputo, "Apostles of the Impossible: On God and the Gift in Derrida and Marion" in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 185-222, and Mark Manolopoulos, *If Creation is a Gift* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), 76-79. For Marion, debt enters into the definition of gift (the gift is givable insofar as one has the duty to give it) while for Derrida debt is "poison" to the gift. Marion attempts to think gift and givenness beyond the economies of "presence" and "causation", while Derrida attempts to think beyond the economy of credit and debt.

Thus, aporetically, the condition of possibility for the occurrence of gift (i.e. that the gift be seen *as* a gift) is also its condition of *impossibility*. Milbank subverts this aporetic discourse by introducing the idea of a *shared* good, thus refusing the opposition of self-love and love for the other. He also argues that if the repetition of the gift is *non-identical*—involving the continual arrival of the Good through time, and allowing for surprising variation and plural participation—then the counter-gift need not mean the collapse of gift(s) into the “subjective” horizon of a calculating ego turned upon itself, nor into the “objective” economic horizon that mediates between such egos (as the next quote from him will show, Milbank typically capitalizes the “Good” in keeping with his Platonic predilections).

Catherine Keller, in her contribution to *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to “Radical Orthodoxy”*,⁴ agrees with John Milbank on the following point. The unilateralist (purely altruistic) understanding of ethics, gift and love favoured by Jan Patočka,⁵ Lévinas and Derrida, fails to arrive at a properly relational and receptive picture of the giving self.⁶ In relation to gift specifically, Keller claims (as does Milbank) that only a self-contained ego would give “gifts” to the other while being effectively neutral as to whether the other chooses to enter a reciprocal relationship with oneself or not.

⁴ Catherine Keller, “Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank’s *Being Reconciled*” in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to “Radical Orthodoxy”* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 18-35.

⁵ It is appropriate that Milbank lists Patočka first (*BR*, 139). Petr Lom observes that “Patočka has had a marked influence upon French postmodern thought, particularly in the recent shift from deconstruction and playful *jouissance* to the ethical and spiritual, especially in the later works of Foucault and Derrida, both of whom cite Patočka as a cardinal influence upon this transformation.” Jan Patočka, *Plato and Europe*, trans. Petr Lom (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), xix.

⁶ *BR*, 139. Keller adds Jean-Marion to this list (“Is That All?”, 26). While this is true to Milbank’s thought, on the page she cites Milbank does not in fact mention Marion. Milbank himself cites Jan Patočka, *Essais Hérétiques sur la Philosophie de l’Histoire*, trans. E. Abrams (Paris: Verdier, 1981); Jacques Derrida, “Donner la Mort” in *L’Éthique du Don*, eds J.-M. Rabaté and Michael Wetzell (Paris: Métailié-Transition, 1992); Emmanuel Lévinas, “Time and the Other” (Extract) in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Sean Hand (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), *Autrement que l’être ou au-delà de l’essence* (Paris: Kluwer, 1990). Other relevant primary texts that should be added here are Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), and Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979). Samuel Moyn’s work on Lévinas is excellent. See chapters 5 and 6 and the epilogue in Samuel Moyn, *Origins of the Other: Emmanuel Levinas Between Revelation and Ethics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2005), 164-260.

Chapter 2 – Reciprocity and Paradox

[T]o emulate the absolute anonymity of giving ... would according to Derrida characterize a pure gift, and indeed characterize it as the impossible. And such purity absolves the giver therefore from relationship itself; it emulates the absolute self-presence of an Unmoved Mover, of one not subject to reciprocity, to influence, to interdependence.⁷

For Milbank, indeed, the Good is not selflessness precisely, but ecstatic enjoyment of communion:⁸

There is no true respect for the other involved here [in Derrida's and Marion's unilateralism], since the gesture which allows the other to persist outside of his communication with you is seen as more definitive of the Good than the living communication which you enjoy with the other.⁹

For this Anglo-Catholic, gift and social existence should not be separated:

[G]ift-giving is a mode (*the* mode in fact) of social being, and in ignoring this, both Derrida and Marion remain trapped within Cartesian myths of prior subjectivity after all.¹⁰

These three passages will be evaluated shortly (next section). Keller also agrees with Milbank on the methodological root of this problematic outcome. Derrida, and then Jean-Luc Marion, make the mistake of reducing exchange to contract, such that genuine transcendence toward the other can only then be thought “reactively” (against “Maussian exchange”¹¹) in terms of self-sacrifice. “Milbank argues convincingly that to reduce *exchange* to *contract or to debt* is to reinscribe the dualism between unilateral gift and abject recipient ...” For Keller, it is important not to make the “quasi-Cartesian” error of dividing giving from receiving, such that

⁷ Keller, “Is That All?”, 20.

⁸ “Modern ethics, just because it enthrones altruism, is pathological in its degree of obliteration of the possibility of consummation, or of the beginning of beatitude in a time simply to be enjoyed, and a conviviality to be celebrated by the living self.” *BR*, 144.

⁹ *BR*, 155. Milbank continues, “But if we truly value the other, we must value meeting him in his specificity and therefore my presence before the other is ineradicable from a situation which is paradigmatic for the ethical.”

¹⁰ *BR*, 156. Milbank's emphasis. Leading into this passage: “[A] true gift must be a considered gift appropriate to its donee; hence one must *already* have entered into an exchange with her. Before a gift can be given, it must already have started to be received.” However, cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, 2002), 136-8, for the intrinsic “givability” of the gift in Marion.

¹¹ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (London: Cohen & West Ltd, 1969). See §2.7. below.

one party is a purely a giver while the other is purely a recipient. This mode of “giving” would not represent genuine relation with the other; in this situation, the other would be positioned unethically, as a non-active and utterly dependent “target” of so-called “gift”. “... And perhaps more fundamentally, it reinforces a quasi-Cartesian separation of subject (giving or receiving) and other (receiving or giving).”¹²

Keller notes that Marion, who is in fact an important interlocutor of Milbank,¹³ takes this problematic unilateralism to its logical conclusion¹⁴ (see Marion’s quote below). Marion is a contemporary Catholic phenomenologist who fashions a new phenomenological “reduction” beyond Husserl and Heidegger; this “third” reduction (after “objectness” and “Being/*Ereignis*”) is meant to bracket everything but the “pure givenness” of the phenomenon.¹⁵ With Derrida, Marion attempts to move beyond the dialectic of “self-return” supposedly found in Marcel Mauss’s anthropology of the gift.¹⁶ Marion thus takes on board Derrida’s anti-exchangist principle: “For there to be a gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, counter-gift, or debt”.¹⁷ However, Marion proceeds differently from Derrida—not *away* from pure phenomenology but *toward* pure givenness.¹⁸ But although

¹² Keller, “Is That All?”, 7. Keller’s emphasis.

¹³ See in particular John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love” in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 253-317. There are references to Marion in many of Milbank’s essays on the gift; refer to note 31 below. Milbank actually has *several* issues with Marion’s approach, as “The Gift and the Mirror” explains. Marion is anti-ontological, does not accommodate the need for interpretation and metaphysical “speculation” [see “The Gift and the Mirror”, 254-5 for Milbank’s distinction between theology and onto-theology, and also his “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics: On the Modalities of Terror” in Connor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler, Jr, *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 452-499] and overemphasises the transcendence of God. Yet Milbank et. al. still find Marion—a member of the *Communio* circle of academics—respectable enough to be included in a prominent link from the Nottingham Centre for Theology and Philosophy. See www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk

¹⁴ Keller, “Is That All?”, 26.

¹⁵ Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given*. See also *Reduction and Givenness: Investigations of Husserl, Heidegger, and Phenomenology*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1998) and *In Excess: Studies of Saturated Phenomena*, trans. Robyn Horner and Vincent Berraud (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002). See also Dominique Janicaud, “The Theological Turn of French Phenomenology”, in Dominique Janicaud, et. al, *Phenomenology and the “Theological Turn”: The French Debate*, trans. Bernard G. Prusak (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 16-103, esp. 56-62, and Robyn Horner, *Jean-Luc Marion: A Theo-logical Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005).

¹⁶ Mauss, *The Gift*.

¹⁷ Derrida, *Given Time*, 12.

¹⁸ See note 3 above for another important difference.

Milbank sides with Derrida in opposing the idea of pure phenomenology,¹⁹ for Milbank and Keller it is specifically the Derridean, anti-exchangist element which brings Marion to problematic extremes in his reflections on gift:

Only the enemy makes the gift possible; he makes the gift evident by denying it reciprocity—in contrast to the friend, who involuntarily lowers the gift to the level of a loan with interest. The enemy thus becomes the ally of the gift, and the friend its adversary.²⁰

Hence Keller and Milbank are united in their disagreement with Lévinasian ethical theory with its emphasis on self-sacrifice, though Keller comes from a feministic viewpoint: “I find myself in agreement with him when he avers that ‘there can only be more than egotism, there can only be love, if there is ecstatic reciprocity and interplay of characters ...’”²¹ Keller also points out favourably that Milbank places primary emphasis on the reciprocal spiritual erotics found in the Gospel of John, rather than on the disinterested love of neighbour which Derrida and Marion retrieve from Luke one-sidedly.²²

[Milbank] contrasts John’s Gospel to that of Luke, with its test imperatives of non-returnable love ... While not rejecting the synoptic perspective, Milbank prefers John’s Gospel, “where there is no mention of loving enemies, where love seems to endlessly circulate among friends—I in you, and you in me ...”²³

¹⁹ See, eg., Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”, 284-292.

²⁰ Marion, *Being Given*, 89. Cited in Keller, “Is That All?”, 26. To be fair, §9 of *Being Given* explores various situations in which the gift might be able to occur in its aneconomic purity, by virtue of the “Bracketing of the Givee” (this chapter has the following subtitles: “The Anonymous”, “The Enemy”, “The Ingrate”, and “The Eschatological and the Universal” in which Christ is the recipient of the gift after all, cf. Matthew 25:37, 40, 44). In §§10 and 11 Marion explores the bracketing of the giver and then of the gift, respectively. It would be a mistake to take too literally Marion’s comment about the enemy being the condition for gift; this is the outcome of just one reduction in a series of exploratory experiments which are to be taken together.

²¹ Keller, “Is That All?”, 26. Keller cites *BR*, 203. More precisely, Milbank states that such love and ecstatic reciprocity requires that those involved have some “affinity”. But Keller’s selective quotation does not distort Milbank’s thought in this case. For some feminist responses to Lévinas, see Luce Irigaray, “Questions to Emmanuel Levinas,” in *The Levinas Reader*, ed. Margaret Whitford (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 188-89; Tina Chanter, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001); Tina Chanter, *Time, Death and the Feminine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

²² Keller, “Is That All?”, 25-29. Cf. Luke 6:27-36, 14:7-14. For a useful introduction to “gift” in contemporary theory, see Sarah Coakley, “Why Gift? Gift, Gender and Trinitarian Relations in Milbank and Tanner”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 61 (2008), 224-235.

²³ Keller, “Is That All?”, 25; *BR*, 160. Cf. John 17, esp. vv 20-25.

What Keller does not point out, however, is that Milbank's polemic against Patočka, Lévinas, and Derrida (and later, also Jean-Luc Marion) is actually made in the context of a discussion of the relation between Christianity and moral luck. In *Being Reconciled: Ontology and Pardon* [BR], he argues that "... Christianity embraces moral luck to such an extreme degree that it transforms all received ideas of the ethical," and that

these received ideas of the ethical ... all subscribe to a 'sacrificial economy' ... in two different variants: either in terms of the giving up of the lesser for the greater, or else for a more radical notion of absolute sacrifice of self for the other, without any 'return' for, or of the self, in any guise whatsoever. The second variant ... which I will argue is but this same economy taken to its logical extreme, has been recently espoused in different but profoundly analogous ways by [these three thinkers].²⁴

Before exploring the theme of grace and moral luck, some of the claims made by Milbank and Keller in their polemic against unilateralism, should be questioned.

2.3. Some Reservations

In respect to the first quote above,²⁵ what might one make of Keller's claim that a pure giver is not in any way "moved," and that he absolves himself from "relationship itself"? It is not clear that a giver's anonymity in respect to a particular act of charity, and even his or her lack of any desire to enter "relationship" with the respective beneficiary, is enough to absolve this giver from "relationship itself". One might willingly engage in reciprocity with other persons, without seeking to relate in a similar way with some recipient of one's anonymous charity. Moreover, to remain anonymous and removed from the other does not mean to remain completely "unmoved" at all. Television advertisements created by World Vision and other

²⁴ "... Against this view ... I shall argue that a self-sacrificial view of morality is first, immoral, second, impossible, and third, a deformation, not the fulfilment, as Patočka [*sic*] echoed by Derrida claims, of the Christian gospel." BR, 139.

²⁵ "[T]o emulate the absolute anonymity of giving ... would according to Derrida characterize a pure gift, and indeed characterize it as the impossible. And such purity absolves the giver therefore from relationship itself; it emulates the absolute self-presence of an Unmoved Mover, of one not subject to reciprocity, to influence, to interdependence." Keller, "Is That All?", 20.

charity organisations are intended to facilitate our “being moved” by the plight of our fellow human beings—particularly that of children, who seem to appeal to our sentiment the most. But it is certainly possible to respond to these appeals with passion, yet *without* desiring to enter into some ongoing relationship with those who hold some form of ethical claim over our attention and then our money (in many cases, of course, letters *are* exchanged). There is nothing inherently contradictory or incoherent about this mode of ethical response.

Perhaps a more promising way of arguing for the inseparability of reciprocity and ethical response, is as follows. To regard the other as someone *essentially unworthy* of interpersonal relationship, or as a pure recipient *in every respect* and so unable, in principle, to offer anything—not even by embodying or manifesting, unintentionally, something of the Good—such extreme non-receptivity in regard to the other *does* seem to be incompatible with a true response to the other, even if this were to take the form of anonymous charity. While such “pure donation” might result in some material benefit for the other, the “word” of this so-called giver, or the way in which the latter situated the recipient, would be against the spirit of charity. In that sense, the “dualism between unilateral gift and abject recipient”²⁶ is certainly troublesome.

However, this modified argument for the inseparability of reciprocity and ethical response works only on the condition that “reciprocity” is understood in a weaker sense than before. The first claim was that gift-giving could not be truly generous apart from (hope for) reciprocity. This seems to be false—unless “reciprocity” is understood weakly, such that it is fulfilled by the ethical subject simply on condition that he/she is “donative” and “receptive”. But such “receptivity” need not involve some reciprocal “relationship” through time; being open to a vision of the other *as a unique bearer of the Good* may well suffice. Hence, to offer

²⁶ Keller, “Is That All?”, 7.

anonymous charity to a particular benefactor (individual or collective) and hope for nothing in return—not even some meaningful “relationship”—is *not* yet to “emulate ... an Unmoved Mover”—especially not if this act of charity is made in response to a certain ethical vision of the other as an embodiment of the Good (and so as already a “giver” and worthy of entering relationship).

In respect to the second quote,²⁷ what is problematic about seeing the “gesture which allows the other to persist outside of his communication with [oneself]” as “more definitive of the Good”? As the passages above make clear, Milbank is against philosophical “nominalism” (the thesis that individuals have their full being “atomically”, or in other words, prior to ecstatic relation in which persons receive themselves anew from and with each other) as well as what one might call “pragmatic” nominalism (acting in accordance with that thesis). But such a pragmatics need not be adopted or expressed in anonymous benevolence. For instance, one might be a strong believer in the importance of family life, and donate money to an organisation that helps families through their difficulties. The fact that one does not intend to form a relationship with any of the benefactors does not mean that this act of charity negates the truth and value of relationality. To absolve oneself from exchange and communion with a benefactor, is not necessarily to position oneself *or* the other as an individual “persisting outside communication”. Indeed, in many cases it would be presumptuous, even egoistic—and so in an important sense, *not relational enough*—to assume that the other would be better off in some ongoing relationship with *oneself*, than not. In many cases, therefore, it would be more true to the Good to *allow* the other to persist “outside communication with oneself”. Of

²⁷ “There is no true respect for the other involved here [in Derrida’s and Marion’s unilateralism], since the gesture which allows the other to persist outside of his communication with you is seen as more definitive of the Good than the living communication which you enjoy with the other.” *BR*, 155.

course, it would be another thing altogether to will that the other be banished from all modes of society.

A distinction is required, then, between absolving oneself and/or the other from communion *as such*, and absolving oneself and/or the other from *particular relations with particular persons*. One problem with Milbank's presentation of his ontology of reciprocity, at least in *BR*, is the lack of any clear distinction between wanting communion *for* the other, and wanting communion *with* the other. (One can, nevertheless, make a good argument against taking the "gesture which allows the other to persist outside of his communication with oneself" as "more definitive of the Good". For, while it might be problematic to *include* communication with oneself in one's definition of the Good, it seems equally problematic to *exclude* communication with oneself in this definition. In the first case it is presumed that the ultimate good for each person automatically includes relationship with oneself; in the second case it is thought that it is better for each person if he or she "persist[s] outside communication with [oneself].") One might also mention Milbank's failure to distinguish between different levels of intimacy when he claims that gift-exchange is what makes for "society". For example, a letter of thanks written by a recipient of a scholarship to the corresponding donor (philanthropist) may well be described as a "counter-gift", and this exchange of gifts could already be a form of "society". Yet this instance of "reciprocity" need not amount to a more lasting and intimate bond such as that between friends. It is not clear to what extent such intimacy is supposed to be essential to the "reciprocity in gift-exchange" to which Milbank refers. Finally, Milbank's reference to Descartes is imprecise (see the third quote above²⁸—and the paragraph after that for Keller's similar lack of precision). In which way does their "ignorance" of the fact that gift-giving is "*the* mode of social being" make

²⁸ "[G]ift-giving is a mode (*the* mode in fact) of social being, and in ignoring this, both Derrida and Marion remain trapped within Cartesian myths of prior subjectivity after all." *BR*, 156, Milbank's emphasis.

Derrida and Marion “Cartesian”, in the sense of encouraging the idea of a solitary, self-present, pre-relational *ego*? For it is possible (i) to understand the “subject” as always-already ruptured by some call from the Other, while (ii) also thinking self-transcendence in terms *other* than social reciprocity. If, as Milbank argues, Derrida and Marion are “Cartesian” insofar as they embrace (ii), they are surely *anti*-“Cartesian” insofar as they embrace (i).²⁹

However, these points do not amount to an argument in favour of Derrida or Marion, against Milbank’s understanding of the gift. They signal, rather, the importance of clarity and precision when making philosophical (or theological) gestures in favour of the primacy of “relationality” or “reciprocity”.³⁰ After the next section, Dietrich von Hildebrand’s phenomenology of love will be introduced to make up for Milbank’s lack of precision.

2.4. The Context of Milbank’s Narrative: Grace and Moral Luck

Catherine Keller’s references to “Grace: The Midwinter Sacrifice” are appropriate. That essay’s third section contains an accessible summary of Milbank’s polemic against unilateralism.³¹ As already indicated, however, Keller does not take account of the broader context of that chapter of *BR*.

²⁹ For the sake of simplicity, I have put aside the role that the (idea of) the infinite plays in founding the subject, according to Descartes’ *Meditations*. Thus “Cartesian” is placed in scare quotes.

³⁰ Kevin Vanhoozer makes a similar point. He is right to exact precision in the use of “relationality”, a word which can cover “a multitude of sins”. “The term *relation* is by itself not very illuminating, for there are many kinds of relations ... Kenotic-perichoretic theism focuses on *loving* relations that are *mutual*, *reciprocal*, and *inclusive*. Yet these latter qualifiers are hardly adequate, for hatred can be mutual, reciprocal and inclusive as well.” Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144-5. Vanhoozer’s emphasis.

³¹ *BR*, 154-61. See also John Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given? Prolegomena to a Future Trinitarian Metaphysics” in L. Gregory Jones and Stephen E. Fowl (eds), *Rethinking Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 119-61; “The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice” *First Things* 91 (1999), 33-38; “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part One: Reciprocity Refused,” *Modern Theology* 17 (2001), 335-391; “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two: Reciprocity Granted” *Modern Theology* 17 (2001), 485-407; “The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority,” *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004), 212-38; “The Shares of Being or Gift, Relation and Participation: an Essay on the Metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou,” *Centre of Theology and Philosophy* (2006), 24, accessible at www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php#milbank; “The Gift and the Mirror”, esp. 292-300; “The Transcendality of the Gift: A Summary” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 352-363; “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek” in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233, esp. 123ff.

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Usually, Christianity is seen as suppressing ‘moral luck’, or the idea that, to a degree at least, we require good fortune if we are to be good. However, in this chapter, I want to argue to the contrary, that Christianity embraces moral luck to such an extreme degree that it transforms all received ideas of the ethical.³²

In the essay in question, Milbank seeks to invert the position that “modern ethics” (paradigmatically, that of Kant) supposedly takes in relation to antique (Greek and Roman) ethics. Christianity neither (i) continues the antique resistance to moral luck (the idea that fortune plays a large part in whether we are ethically good) in favour of autonomy, nor (ii) abandons the antique concern with happiness. Of course one might object that there certainly have been, and still are, some historical expressions of Christianity that do more or less follow this pattern, but Milbank is making a counter-claim, against Jan Patočka, in regard to the authentic essence of Christianity.³³ Dependence on and hope for the grace to do and be good, is (i) the Christian version of moral luck; such grace is also (ii) the foretaste and promise of resurrected life. Hence it is not the destiny of Christianity to be secularised.³⁴

If [the self-sacrificial or other-regarding morality] is the Christian stance *par excellence*, then it can be readily secularized, as Patočka argued, because omission of the hope for resurrection and eternal life will tend to purify the strictly other-regarding motive still further ... However, this construal may be called into question ... [I will argue that] Christianity, unlike Stoicism, was able to stick with and even augment the goal of happiness or beatitude

³² BR, 139. In that chapter Milbank draws on the work of Nussbaum while making subtle criticisms of her thesis: Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³³ Milbank admits that Christianity might have reversed this pattern only “sporadically.” See BR, 147. For a fairly recent essay expressing his take on Protestantism(s) (as opposed to his Anglo-Catholicism), see “Alternative Protestantism: Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition” in *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, eds. James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 25-41. In regard to Patočka, Milbank’s critique of certain stern and moralistic versions of Christianity brings to mind the juxtaposition staged between a festive and a non-festive *ethos* in three Scandinavian films: Ingmar Bergman’s *Fanny och Alexander* (Fanny and Alexander, 1982), Gabriel Axel’s *Babettes gæstebud* (Babette’s Feast, 1987), and Kay Pollak’s *Så som i himmelen* (As It Is in Heaven, 2004).

³⁴ The first place to look for Milbank’s thoughts on secularization is his *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) [henceforth: TST2] (the first edition was published by Blackwell in 1990). More recently, see for e.g. his “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics”; and “On Theological Transgression” in *The Future of Love*, 145-174 [the original version appeared alongside other articles responding to Milbank’s work, especially *Theology and Social Theory*, in *Arachne*, vol. 2, no. 1 (1995)]

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through a novel abandonment of the goal of self-possession, even in its mode of ethical reduction ...³⁵

Milbank's words on the "dispossession" of one's own (hopefully good) deeds form a refreshing counterbalance to the self-congratulation which often comes with our contemporary ethical sensibilities. And while Milbank does not subscribe to the complete "death of the subject", one can detect here the influence of French post-structuralism (throughout his career, Milbank has always kept "up to date", even as he looks back to the Church Fathers and the high Middle Ages³⁶). As for Germany, parts of the following passage (not the reference to Christianity) are reminiscent of Heidegger's lecture against humanism.³⁷

We never know in advance, strictly speaking, what we are going to do or say ... Suppose it is the case that to be ethical is not to possess something, not even to possess one's own deed. Suppose it is, from the outset, to receive the gift of the other as something that diverts one's life, and to offer one's life in such a way that you do not know in advance what it is that you will give, but must reclaim it retrospectively. A total exposure to fortune, or rather to grace...³⁸

As already indicated, Milbank associates the event of the gift, not just with the arrival of grace, but also with the theological motif of resurrection. In this way he is able to argue that

³⁵ "However, this construal may be called into question. *Should* one read Christian ethics as abandoning the antique concern with happiness, and yet sustaining its requirement for secure self-possession (even if this is now reduced to the willed gesture of absolute non self-possession)? Or can one construe things precisely the other way round? That is to say, that Christianity, unlike Stoicism, was able to stick with and even augment the goal of happiness or beatitude through a novel abandonment of the goal of self-possession, even in its mode of ethical reduction? ... This is what I eventually wish to argue." *BR*, 141-2. Milbank's emphasis.

³⁶ Compare Hans Urs von Balthasar, "The Fathers, the Scholastics and Ourselves", *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 24 (1997), 347-96. Refer to note 131 below for Milbank's ambivalent relation to postmodernism.

³⁷ Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," trans. Frank A. Capuzzi and J. Glenn Gray, in Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, edited by David F. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 2008), 213-66. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism is a Humanism*, trans. John Kulka with an introduction by Arlette Elkaim-Sartre (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007). Milbank is far more conversant with French scholarship. Sartre is not worthy of his attention, Lévinas appears mostly as an example of how not to think (Milbank, "The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice" and "The Shares of Being", also "The Gift and the Mirror," pp. 270, 327), while Merleau-Ponty receives praise for his intertwining of subject and object and his overcoming previous dualisms between the visible and the invisible, plus his thoughts on touch and the body (Milbank, "The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two"; "The Double Glory", 124; "The Gift and the Mirror", 270). See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) and *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London and New York: Routledge, 1962).

³⁸ At the first ellipsis: "Intentions 'come to us', as it were, from the Muses, and we are not in command of them ... Even to formulate a good intention, it seems, we need moral luck ... But here, at last, at the most extreme point of ruination of even the ethical intention, everything can run into reverse. Christianity is perhaps (sporadically) the history of this running into reverse." *BR*, 147.

the “dispossession” of one’s self in favour of the gift and the other need not be thought in terms of self-sacrifice. The place of resurrection and eschatology in *BR*, and also Milbank’s references to marriage and feasting, will be explained below (next two sections). Along the way, the legitimacy of Milbank’s approach to the gift will be questioned further, using explicitly, this time, the Scholastic distinction between *intentio benevolentiae* (benevolence) and *intentio unionis* (desire for interpersonal union).

2.5. Reciprocity under Question: Dietrich von Hildebrand on Benevolence and Union

In support of Milbank, it can be argued that a unilateralist reading of gift excludes an important modality of gift, namely, the entrustment of oneself in the hope for mutual relationship. On this issue, John Milbank and Dietrich von Hildebrand (a prominent Catholic phenomenologist and esteemed student of Edmund Husserl) are in agreement, though Milbank never cites von Hildebrand:

A person can give me no greater gift than desiring union with me and longing for the return of my love. If he is only generous and kind to me but I clearly see that he does not desire my presence or seek out any union with me, then, for all of my gratitude to me for his kindness, I do not experience the special and irreplaceable happiness that his love with its *intentio unionis* can confer on me.³⁹

The title of this section of *The Nature of Love* is telling: “The yearning for unity as a kind of self-donation; the incompatibility of egoism with the real union of love.”⁴⁰ It would seem that von Hildebrand pays more attention to the phenomenon (or phenomena) of love than Derrida and Marion, who, in their opposition to “return”, arbitrarily presuppose the “nominalistic”

³⁹ Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, trans. John F. Crosby with John Henry Crosby (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009), 131. Apart from the introductory material in *The Nature of Love*, see John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996) for some useful commentary on von Hildebrand.

⁴⁰ Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 131-138.

opposition of self-love and other-love.⁴¹ For this German philosopher, it is simply false to say that to receive enjoyment and benefit, or to take an interest in these, is to “remain locked in my immanence”. For an important mode of self-giving is allowing the other to contribute (in some way, in some degree) to one’s happiness. Anticipating the final section below, one might say that von Hildebrand thus performs a “paradoxical synthesis” of giving-and-receiving. Certainly, deriving enjoyment from the other can fall short of ethical transcendence in some situations (e.g. a king’s being entertained by a jester, or by an exotic dancer). But it would be a mistake to generalise from this, and decide that any mode of happiness or gain necessarily contradicts the spirit of self-giving.

To repeat, von Hildebrand’s phenomenological clarity and honesty leads him to admit, against such apriorism, that to hope for the enjoyment and benefit of unity with another is not only *compatible* with self-donation, but is an important *type* of self-donation. For this phenomenologist of value, it is possible for the human person to take an interest in something “having value in itself.” More precisely, we can and do intend things and persons *under their axiological aspect*, and so not *just* as “something beneficial for [oneself].” But one should not conclude from this that a “pure value response” indifferent to all gain and happiness is a superior, more “spiritual” way-of-being. Receptivity to the other, and to the enjoyment and happiness he or she might bring in whatever way, is in many cases an essential ingredient of being generously open to the other:

There are two fundamental misunderstandings of man [*sic*] and of his nature and dignity as a person. One of them goes in the direction of obscuring his transcendence, holding that man is in principle incapable of taking an interest in something having value in itself but that he can only be moved by something beneficial for himself. The opposite misunderstanding consists in thinking that man achieves his full destiny when he no longer has any beneficial goods for

⁴¹ I am referring to Jean-Luc Marion’s anti-exchangist narrative of gift, not his *The Erotic Phenomenon*, trans. Stephen E. Lewis (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

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himself, when he has become indifferent to happiness and unhappiness to the point of living only by pure value-response. On this view, I am thought to remain locked in my immanence if I take an interest in something beneficial for myself, in fact I am thought to be selfish and to live at odds with every kind of transcendence. Both conceptions are disastrous errors.⁴²

For Milbank, these two errors are “dialectically the same”; they both assume that interest in another and interest in oneself are fundamentally in conflict. But such is fatal for an understanding of interpersonal relationship. In this context, both Milbank and von Hildebrand point to marriage. The former, drawing on contemporary German philosopher Robert Spaemann, makes positive reference to both marriage and feasting in order to make more concrete the idea of belonging-together:

[T]o look for our collective participation in divine fullness of being is to transcend in an ‘objective’ and self-less manner either egotistic or self-sacrificial concerns. For Spaemann this ecstasy is epitomized by the *feast*, in which mere bodily need is transfigured in collective celebration: here we eat only because and when others eat, and yet we do not renounce ourselves, for we eat also.⁴³

Thus for Milbank, marriage and feasting form the “only viable paradigm for the Good itself” (this rather strong claim will be questioned below). The good of the self and that of the other are *harmonised*, not by collapsing one into the other, but in reference to a transcendent Good shared reciprocally.⁴⁴ To expand on this: the condition of avoiding selfishness at the feast (interpreting all food as “present-at-hand”, simply “for me”) is not self-sacrifice (renouncing all food as if it were simply “for others”, or completely negating or suppressing its “being for oneself”), but *sharing* (eating-with-others, interpreting the food laid out as “for us”). Companions are neither essentially selfish “hogs”—pigs do not intentionally *share* their

⁴² Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 205-6.

⁴³ BR 149, Milbank’s emphasis. For other references to Spaemann see BR, 142-3, 146.

⁴⁴ “The second element in the complex of notions which construes the ethical as sacrificial is the idea of death as the ground of morality. I have already indicated how this manifestly celebrates something negative as the precondition of something positive in a way that is self-contradictory, and I have also already shown how a self-surrender without hope of self-return gives upon the hope for ecstatic communication, for ‘feasting’ and for ‘marriage’, which is only viable paradigm for the Good itself.” BR, 157. Pages 150-154 are a reflection on Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*.

food—*nor* essentially abstinent. Companions are, quite literally, those who share (L. *com*) their bread (L. *panis*).⁴⁵ It would seem that this “togetherness” is made explicit and is the performance of intimacy. Hence, it is more than the *merely factual* togetherness of those eating take-away in a shopping-mall, or those eating in the same room where each is absorbed in a television show and thus in his/her own “world.”⁴⁶

As for the German phenomenologist, in a section of *The Nature of Love* entitled, “The error of thinking that the absence of the *intentio unionis* in love of neighbour is the source of its moral selflessness”,⁴⁷ von Hildebrand points out the following. One spouse in a marriage does not love the other by way of being indifferent to his or her own happiness and intending only the *other’s* happiness. On the contrary, marital love is essentially the *harmonisation* of the two. In their better moments, and (one might add) even in their lesser moments, husband and wife are happy-together; they give each other some share in happiness, and even “are” the happiness of each other. This peculiar manifestation of love—marital love, in which happiness exists as *mutual* happiness—would be misunderstood if its essence and standard were thought to be the same as that of “love of neighbour”:

The exclusive “for the other’s sake,” the removal of my own person, my own happiness and subjectivity [*Eigenleben*], represents in this kind of love [love of neighbour] the fullness of pure self-donation, of victoriously flowing love. But in spousal love an exclusive “for the other’s sake” and a removal of my own person would in no way represent the fullness of spousal love. On the contrary, a man who would say to a woman, “I want to marry you only for the sake of your happiness, so that you might be happy—my own happiness is not important,” would obviously not love her at all with spousal love, and he would by such an

⁴⁵ I learnt of this in a sermon by Rev. Prof. Michael Tate.

⁴⁶ One might even question the intimacy/companionship of those involved in an orgy. But this introduces another question—what mode or degree of sensual enjoyment best serves *communal sharing*? See Gabriel Axel’s film, *Babettes gæstebud* (Babette’s Feast, 1987).

⁴⁷ Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 138-144. “*Intentio unionis*” is kept without italics in Crosby’s translation.

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attitude withhold for her the *great gift* that makes the spousally beloved person so deeply happy ...⁴⁸

For von Hildebrand, the “great gift” that makes one’s spouse happy, is the fact that one has allowed one’s happiness to depend greatly on loving him/her and on being loved by him/her in return. Here the reception and possession of happiness coincides with the giving of happiness (and vice versa).

Now besides their obvious (if unintended) agreement, there is an important difference between Milbank and von Hildebrand in their positive assessments of reciprocity. The latter simply points out that in the case of marriage (and also friendship), to *receive* the gift of happiness is already to *give* oneself and thus also *give* happiness. But Milbank claims that this synthesis of giving and receiving as exemplified most perfectly in marriage and feasting, is in fact “the only viable paradigm for the Good itself”.⁴⁹ One might be inclined to think that von Hildebrand’s approach is more reasonable and balanced here. Where Milbank’s predilection for a unified theological vision moves him quickly toward the idea that infinite reciprocity is the supreme Good of which the unilateral gift is but a moment⁵⁰ (see next section), von Hildebrand is more careful. While the latter agrees that

it is wrong to take traits of the love of neighbour that derive from its particular categorical identity and to make them into conditions for real and authentic self-donation as such, and so to regard as selfish all those kinds of love that lack these traits⁵¹

his painstaking attention to differences guards him from denying a certain equivocality between types of love. For this phenomenologist of value, the disinterestedness that makes for

⁴⁸ Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 139. My emphasis.

⁴⁹ *BR*, 157.

⁵⁰ “Of course, one’s celebration of such an encounter may require one in certain circumstances to sacrifice oneself, even unto death, and one can go further and say that in a fallen world [for Milbank this is a contingent situation] the only path to recovery of mutual giving will *always* pass through an element of apparently ‘unredeemed’ sacrifice and apparently sheerly unilateral gift. But the point is that this gesture is not *in itself* the Good, and indeed I have argued, is *not* good at all outside the hope for a redemptive return of the self...” *BR*, 155. Milbank’s emphasis.

⁵¹ Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 140.

perfection in love of neighbour would in the case of marriage (and friendship) represent a fault:

[I]n the case of spousal love such an attitude [of disinterest] would withhold from the other precisely the great gift that confers happiness. This gift is nothing other than the *intentio unionis* ... The very thing that makes for the greatest self-donation in spousal love is not only absent in the love of neighbour—this accords with the theme and the categorical difference of these two loves—but *in fact this absence is constitutive of the excellence of the self-donation found in the love of neighbour* ...⁵²

From this perspective, it might be argued that Milbank, Marion and Derrida all show a *tendency* to think gift too univocally, in terms of *intentio unionis* alone (Milbank) or *intentio benevolentiae* alone (Marion, Derrida).⁵³ For it is plausible that “the excellence of self-donation found in the love of neighbour” on one hand, and the “great gift” of the hope for communion, on the other, are two distinct modalities or expressions of gift, such that it would be a mistake to construct a general theory of gift based on *just one* of these modalities.

⁵² Von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, 139-40. My emphasis.

⁵³ The situation is different in respect to love, however. For Milbank, “‘love’ is complexly spoken of and exemplified just because it is an incurably imprecise analogical concept that indicates no reality other than the mysterious fact that certain diverse experiences and feelings appear, all the same, characteristically to blend together to form a certain loose unity.” “The Gift and the Mirror”, 259-260. Marion thinks love univocally: “A serious concept of love distinguishes itself by its unity, or rather its power to keep together significations that nonerotic thought cuts apart ... Univocal, love is told in *one way*.” Jean-Luc Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 5. Marion’s emphasis. See also 217-222. For commentary see Robyn Horner, “A Thought of Love” in Jean-Luc Marion: *A Theo-Logical Introduction* 135-146; Horner, “The Weight of Love” in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences*, 235-251; Claude Romano, “Love in Its Concept: Jean-Luc Marion’s *The Erotic Phenomenon*,” trans. Stephen E. Lewis in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences*, 319-335; Eoin Cassidy, *Le phénomène érotique: Augustinian Resonances in Marion’s Phenomenology of Love*, in Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (eds), *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 201-219, esp. 215-219. By contrast, Nancy emphasises the equivocity of love; love exists only as “shattered” (*éclaté*): Jean-Luc Nancy, “Shattered Love” in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simon Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 82-109. Milbank approves of Marion’s desire to hold *eros* and *agape* in unity, but according to his Thomistic predilections [John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001)] thinks love should be thought analogically, and also indirectly via beauty, truth and being. See “The Gift and the Mirror”, esp. 284-87. There is an extensive history to the debate over types of love. Thomas Osborne does us a great service in showing the multifarious ways in which types and moments of love have been distinguished, from Aristotle through Augustine and Anselm, to the Middle Ages. See Thomas M. Osborne, Jr., *Love of God and Love of Self in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). While Osborne corrects and qualifies some of the claims of Rousselot regarding “ecstatic love”, and regarding self-curvature in Bernard of Clairvaux, and has a more extensive discussion of Aquinas’s use of the relation between whole and part in his account of love, it is still worth consulting Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001). The bibliographies of both these texts are useful, as is John F. Crosby’s introductory study in von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, xiii-xxxvi. Two texts frequently cited are Anders Nygren, *Agape and Eros*, trans. Philip S. Watson (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) and the rather simplistic C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1960). Finally, see Benedict XVI’s integration of *eros* and *agape* in his encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, and Milbank’s approval of this in “The Future of Love: A Reading of Benedict XVI’s Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*” in *The Future of Love*, 364-670.

How, then, does Milbank attempt to argue, against such “equivocity”, for the *primacy and universality* of reciprocity—noting that this is more than just the *compatibility* of gift and reciprocity? The answer to this question involves the theme of resurrection.

2.6. Reciprocity and Resurrection

2.6.1. A First Argument

For Milbank in *BR*, infinite reciprocity is the supreme Good of which the sacrificial gift is but a moment. In fact, sacrificial gift is for him only a *contingent* moment of our participation in the Good in a fallen world:

Of course, one’s celebration of such an encounter [with others] may require one in certain circumstances to sacrifice oneself, even unto death, and one can go further and say that in a fallen world [for Milbank this is a contingent situation] the only path to recovery of mutual giving will *always* pass through an element of apparently ‘unredeemed’ sacrifice and apparently sheerly unilateral gift. But the point is that this gesture is not *in itself* the Good, and indeed I have argued, is *not* good at all outside the hope for a redemptive return of the self ...⁵⁴

Here Milbank claims that hope for the “redemptive return” of oneself is essential to a properly ordered participation in the Good. It is “not good at all” to will the good of others without hoping in the Good oneself, and thus hoping to *be* oneself more fully. This argument can be supplemented as follows. The condition for loving another is to love the Good, the very ground of the other’s being and goodness. Hence, it would be contradictory to love the other as a certain manifestation of the “inherent goodness and beauty of being as such” while not loving ourselves, or more precisely, our “true” selves:

⁵⁴ “... albeit that this is an eschatological hope which never permits us to expect a return at any particular place or specific moment of time, or to elicit any specific *mode* of return.” *BR*, 155. Milbank’s emphasis.

[S]elf-love is valid as our self-reception of that portion of the cosmos that we ourselves are and so are closest to—even if, as St. Augustine clearly affirms, *we should only love ourselves to the degree that we persist in our true selves, as loving God and our neighbours*. In Augustine at least, there is none of that ‘metaphysical’ priority of self-love that Marion denounces, just because *the true self loves itself only as the self that loves God and others*, which always remains possible because of the inherent goodness and beauty of being as such.⁵⁵

2.6.2. *Intervention: An Important Distinction*

Such, at least, is *one* argument (or gesture) that Milbank adopts in *BR* in support of his claim that a more unilateral expression of gift/love is “not in itself the Good.” Another argument that Milbank offers is as follows. To give is *already* to receive and partake more perfectly *in the gift of the Good* and so experience an increase in being or life. To anticipate, this merges with Milbank’s argument for the necessity of hope in the resurrection.⁵⁶ However, while these attacks on the ethics of self-sacrifice may well hit their mark, one might question whether they suffice as an argument for the idea that reciprocity is the Good.⁵⁷ For there are many aspects to the unilateralist’s denial of all self-return in a supposedly perfect love or gift.

First, there is the attempt to think the absence of any increase in being or fruition on the side of the lover or giver. Such an increase might be immediate and “automatic”, being a function of loving, of actively participating in the Good, as just explained. Or it might be eschatologically delayed, the reward of glory in heaven.⁵⁸ But second, there is also the attempt to think *the absence of any ensuing union or relationship which might contribute to*

⁵⁵ Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”, 265-66. My emphasis. See also Milbank, “Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul”, *Modern Theology* 13 (1997), 451-74; Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages*; Osborne, *Love of God and Love of Self in Thirteenth-Century Ethics*.

⁵⁶ “[H]ope that it may be given to me in the next moment to act well, is inseparable from the hope that there may be universal acting-well ... [T]o be ethical therefore is to believe in the Resurrection, and somehow to participate in it. And outside this belief and participation there is, quite simply, no ‘ethical’ whatsoever.” *BR*, 148. Resurrection is examined in §2.6.3.

⁵⁷ Or if more precision is demanded (beyond Milbank), that reciprocity is the form in which the Good is most perfectly expressed, or in which its infinite virtuality is most fully expressed.

⁵⁸ One might imagine the latter to be simply the full revelation and presence of the former.

the happiness of the lover/giver. Third, it is claimed that, not only must there be no gift of *self* on behalf of the recipient, including simply the gift of gratitude and/or recognition, there must also be the absence of any *intervening* gift (a material *counter-gift*). And fourth, there is the claim that the giver must not know him/herself as giver.

The last two claims can be usefully grouped together with the second. From the perspective of Milbank (against unilateralism, for reciprocity), to receive an intervening gift, and to be confirmed as giver by the recipient, should be understood as moments of the event of unity in gift-exchange (reciprocity). It is the difference between the first claim and the second which is of interest here. To argue against the *first* claim that (i) actual increase in being (fruition, happiness) and/or hope for such increase is a condition for participating in the Good, and so for genuinely loving/gifting the other, is not yet to argue against the *second* claim. This latter argument would have to affirm that (ii) actual *reciprocity* and/or hope for reciprocity, is also a condition for loving/gifting. Hence, even if it is unethical and/or contradictory to will the good for another without hoping in the good for oneself (see *First Argument*), that does not imply that the good thus hoped for is⁵⁹ reciprocity with this particular other, or even the life of reciprocity in general. Or, turning to the second or supplementary part of the *First Argument*, if the same Good is the principle both of one's own good and that of the other, that is not yet to say that one's own good and that of the other are *actualised together, in the form of reciprocity*. Finally, in respect to the next argument mentioned above,⁶⁰ if to participate in the Good by loving is already to be more perfect and more happy (loving is its own reward), that is not yet to say that the ultimate expression of the Good is loving exchange and union.

⁵⁹ In itself, *or* as intended.

⁶⁰ There it was said: To give is *already* to receive and partake more perfectly *in the gift of the Good* and so experience an increase in being or life.

In short, negating a particular thesis or conclusion put forward in unilateralism, does not necessarily amount to affirming that the Good is reciprocity. To repeat, if one were to negate unilateralism by arguing that one already receives *life* by giving, this is still insufficient as an argument to the effect that giving is *ordered to life-with-the-other*, or mutual self-gift. For it means one thing to “receive life in the Good”, and another to “be renewed in that life *by way of reciprocity*”. It makes an important difference, then, whether or not the life of *reciprocity* is associated with “resurrection”.

Milbank does make this link in his account of the non-identical repetition of gift (see *Second Argument* below). By contrast, certain other references of his to resurrection, such as “the hope for a redemptive return of the self”⁶¹ in the *First Argument* above, do not indicate such reciprocity explicitly. The same distinction can be extracted from the work of Catherine Pickstock, who is another major author in the “Radically Orthodox” theological movement associated with Cambridge.⁶² Pickstock speaks of an “automatic” return of the gift:

[A]ccording to a theological reading of the gift, to give is already to receive the return, which is the gift *to be able* to give. The ‘giving up’ of the gift occurs in trust of a ‘return’ with difference, but this return is not something we earn, nor is it over against the moment of giving up. It is neither subject to any calculation, nor is it a giving-away in order for others to be grateful for the price one has paid. In contrast to Derrida, one can speak of a ‘return’ indissociable from the act of giving, simultaneous with it, a condition of possibility, and yet *not* reducible to an economic market exchange—not reducible because the return is not something one is hoping to receive later, but is something one is already receiving in giving.

Yet, like Milbank, Pickstock refers to a “future” return of the gift *also*, and this is more readily associated with the gift of (unity with) the other. The sentence that follows the above

⁶¹ *BR*, 155.

⁶² The third being Graham Ward. See John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999). Henceforth: *RONT*.

reads: “And insofar as one hopes for a continuous return in the future, one is looking to be surprised rather than for the return of a debt of an anticipated amount.”⁶³

2.6.3. *A Second Argument*

For Milbank, to participate in gift-exchange is “somehow to participate” in the resurrection. According to this Anglo-Catholic, such a reward is not purely and simply a *delayed* one. Responding to a contention of Jan Patočka (that hope for compensation in heaven contaminates the purity of love), he claims that the reception of a more abundant life is not just a future, heavenly reward for a gift/sacrifice made in time. Rather, renewal in Life is immediately and in a sense “automatically” granted to participants in gift-exchange, in virtue of the “surprisingness and unpredictability of gift and counter-gift”.⁶⁴

On this view, to mediate the play of gift is to receive oneself anew as giver and recipient, as participant in gift-exchange. Thus the counter-gift, far from collapsing “economically” into the *identically repetitive* temporality of an autonomous subject, actually renews the ecstatic life in which the self is *non-identically repeated*, or in other words, *received again as gift*. For Milbank, as long as the “return” of the gift gives the first giver to herself in this lively, unpredictable and transformative fashion—as long as the counter-gift represents the arrival, again, of the *self as gift* rather than as autonomous identity impervious to moral “luck” or grace—then exchange does not reduce to contract:

The fuller more abundant life is a return of life always afresh, always differently. Hence what distinguishes gift from contract is not the absolute freedom and non-binding character of the gift (this is our Western counter-part to the *reduction* of exchange to contract, which remains entirely uncriticised by Derrida and Marion, who are unable to assimilate the more truly critical lesson of Mauss), but rather the surprisingness and unpredictability of gift and

⁶³ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 111-12. Pickstock cites Milbank, “Can a Gift be Given?”

⁶⁴ *BR*, 155-56.

counter-gift, or their character in space as *asymmetrical reciprocity*, and their character in time as *non-identical repetition*.⁶⁵

One can retrieve from this the following narrative: If, in the exchange of gifts that pass between participants in reciprocity, these participants are thereby offered *themselves* as gifts, and also co-operatively *enact* themselves as gifts, both receptively and donatively, then gift-exchange does not reduce to contract. To perform oneself (co-operatively, and in both horizontal and vertical directions at once) as *gift*—gift in the sense of (i) an identity which continually arrives since its full meaning is that of a differently repeated vocation fully envisioned only by God, (ii) an identity produced and shared between responding recipient and infinite giver/caller, and (iii) an identity shared between human participants who produce their identities together, creatively—this is to circumvent the stance of a self-enclosed, self-reliant identity who subsequently enters into contract.⁶⁶

Developing this picture further: to offer a gift is to “abandon” oneself to the play of the infinite, and find that it is in this “undoing” of self *with the other*, that one is (continually) given oneself (“undoing” in two senses at once: *letting* gift happen, and being released into relational “fluidity”). Hence, to exchange gifts is for both parties to offer themselves up to the divine and to be sublimated like incense, where the temporality of this vertical sublimation is enfolded into the horizontal, spatial dimension, one gift “inflaming” the next. Again, to participate in gift-exchange is to recognise, through inspiration, that one’s own participation

⁶⁵ *BR*, 156. Milbank’s emphasis. See Mauss, *The Gift*.

⁶⁶ This represents a response to Robyn Horner *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 17-18. Against Milbank, Horner contends that modifying “return” with “delay and difference” does not save the gift from problematic absorption into “economy”.

in the Good, which is a sublimation or “undoing” of self, is inseparable from that of the other. The gift, then, is an eschatological sign promising mutually-found beatitude.⁶⁷

Before commenting on the above, a word on “participation” (objections to Milbank’s use of this Platonic motif will be addressed later⁶⁸). Milbank attempts to think within the “paradox” of eschatological hope—the life of resurrection is both already here (by participation) and not-yet-fully-revealed, not-yet-fully-realised (for the *parousia* occurs at the end of time, beyond time). While the material does not yet “fully shine with the glory of the spiritual”, still the former already participates in the latter, such that even now there is still “no absolute contrast” between the earthly and heavenly cities.⁶⁹

Participation, then, is a crucial element of Milbank’s theo-logic of the gift; it binds together, in time, the complex situation holding (by arriving) between self, other, gift, counter-gift and the divine. It also signifies Milbank’s middle way between pure immanence (subjects which are already fully given since they are not suspended in the divine; subjects which do not arrive together in time, as gift) and a transcendence thought in dialectical opposition to this situation (pure absence/postponement, where this is thought to be the only way to escape immanence, autonomy and contract):

For Derrida ... a gift is only ever a promise of a gift, perpetual postponement ... [But] where there is no intimation *whatsoever* of the donating source, a gift is simply an impersonal intrusion, whose lack of objectifiable content further renders it arbitrary on our part to interpret it as gift, rather than as violent rupture.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ For Milbank on the gift as sign, see his “Paul Against Biopolitics” in John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 21-73, esp. 39.

⁶⁸ Refer to §2.9.1. below.

⁶⁹ Milbank, *The Future of Love*, xv.

⁷⁰ *BR*, 156. Milbank’s emphasis. Regarding the extreme apophaticism to which Milbank objects, see his “The Double Glory”, 160-66, and “On Theological Transgression”, 145-55. As for Jean-Luc Marion, see his *God Without Being: Hors-texte*, trans. Thomas A. Carlson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); more recently there is *The Idol and Distance: Five Studies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001). For the Heideggerian move beyond metaphysics in general, often

Now it is hard to determine what extent the above arguments in favour of gift-exchange rely on their religious context, and it might be difficult to sort less theologically-entrenched claims (if there are any) from the more entrenched ones. But suppose one concedes that Milbank presents a compelling case for the *compatibility* of gift-exchange and true generosity. By thinking the circulation of gift in terms of “non-identical repetition,” it seems that Milbank is able to show that the dynamics at work in the horizon of gift-exchange are *not* necessarily the same as those at work in the horizon(s) of autonomy, egoism and contract. However, returning to von Hildebrand, it is still thinkable that the perfection peculiar to love of neighbour cannot be explained and recuperated within the horizon of gift-exchange and reciprocity. The thesis of universal reciprocity—the idea that the most direct manifestation and most appropriate paradigm of the Good, is to be found in reciprocity (in “marriage and feasting”), and that one participates in the Good *insofar* as one participates somehow in reciprocity—this is only *partially* supported by determining gift-exchange as non-identical repetition. For this *one-sided* determination affirms the possibility, but not the necessity, of the gift occurring in the horizon of gift-exchange. It is still allowed that the Good or the gift might have other, equally true expressions, apart from those that have their being in reciprocity.

A promising step forward in Milbank’s narrative might be somehow to associate gift-exchange and non-identical repetition *bilaterally*. If it were agreed that the event of the Good is always characterised by non-identical repetition (the ever-new and ever-different reception

using the trope of “gift”, see Marion, “Metaphysics and Phenomenology: A Summary for Theologians” in Graham Ward (ed.), *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 279-96; John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds), *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); Robyn Horner, *Rethinking God as Gift*; John D. Caputo, “Who Comes After the God of Metaphysics?” in Caputo (ed), *The Religious* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 1-19, and Martin Heidegger, “The Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics,” in the same volume, 67-75; Calvin O. Schrag, *God as Otherwise Than Being: Toward a Semantics of the Gift* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002); Mary-Jane Rubenstein, “Relationality: The Gift After Ontotheology”, *Telos* 123 (2002), 65-80; John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds), *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

of being), and *if* it were also agreed that the horizon of non-identical repetition is always something like reciprocity or dialogue or gift-exchange, then the equation of reciprocity and the Good may well be complete. A plausible reading of Milbank's defence of "gift-exchange" using "non-identical repetition", then, is that he is unclear on whether he is attempting to establish a *unilateral* or *bilateral* link between the two, and thus unclear on whether he is arguing for the *possibility* or rather the *universality* of gift-exchange. We move now to another relevant argument in *BR*.

2.6.4. A Third Argument

To sustain his claim that reciprocity is universal, Milbank interprets Christologically, and rather speculatively, the call to charity toward "widows and orphans" (a Jewish theme picked up by Lévinas):

[I]t may well be argued that Christianity has combined both perspectives on giving, but if it has done so it is surely more fundamentally under the *aegis* of reciprocity, even though the eschatological character of this goal requires 'an absolutely unilateral' moment of the gift in our time. The sovereign gift from the divine height (to 'widows and orphans') is received only as a gift also returned from below, in the incarnation of the *Logos*, as the return of humanity to the Father.⁷¹

There is, of course, a difficulty in interpreting and evaluating such passages. One problem with Milbank's style is his general failure to clearly explain (let alone *defend*) his more speculative remarks made in passing (and these are many); dense and sweeping statements are presented unpacked and with a rhetorical swiftness that often confounds the reader. However, Milbank's claim in the above seems to be that, if one adopts a broad enough perspective, not even "widows and orphans"—those who are often forgotten and who are in

⁷¹ *BR*, 60. "Likewise ... [God's] gift which is the Holy Spirit only *results* from, and is the manifestation of, the perfect mutuality of Father and Son." Milbank's emphasis. Presumably, by this Milbank means that the Holy Spirit proceeding from the mutual love of Father and Son does not represent a moment of gift beyond the horizon of reciprocity.

special need of charity, and who typically have little if anything to offer in return—not even these are *purely unilateral* recipients of charity. For if charity is understood to be a “sovereign gift from the divine height”, then all of its recipients can be said to return as counter-gifts to the original Giver via the incarnation of the Logos; the latter, in his person, returns humanity to the Father. Milbank’s vision seems to be as follows, then. God the Father only gives charity to humanity—and only calls us to mediate that charity—for the sake of having that same humanity presented to him in Christ. According to this theological picture, the *telos* to which charity is ordered is not *simply* and *ultimately* the good of the individual (this might still favour a meta-ethical “unilateralism”) but is rather the eschatological communion between God and humanity (in Christ). To be sure, this communion is understood to form the *horizon* of the good of individuals.

Admittedly, it is possible that none of this represents a “respectable” argument for the equation of reciprocity and the Good. Indeed, there are many who would say that in general, Milbank’s use of the logical form “if *x*, then necessarily *y*” is ultimately only a *rhetorical* show, a speedy “quasi-demonstration” of the necessity of adopting his view in order to avoid (say) utter meaninglessness. One will not find cautious or “well-formed” arguments here. Yet even if one accepts this view—and one need not have reservations about theology as such to agree that Milbank’s style is problematic—it can still be said that Milbank does open valuable perspectives for thought—in this case, a viewpoint from which it may well be possible to reconcile his “supremacy of reciprocity” with the specificity of love of neighbour (as indicated by von Hildebrand).

For instance, with Milbank one might shift the focus from the human individual as giver, to God as giver. From a theological perspective, then, it might be said that authentic love of neighbour has, as its horizon, faith in the Father who gathers all to Himself through the Son

(and Spirit). On this view, serving the other while “letting him/her go” beyond the expectation of any form of reciprocity with oneself (at least in this life), does not indicate that communion is not the fullness of the Good, only that it is not one’s destiny to have an ongoing relationship with everyone whom one is called to help along their way toward God (and toward others in the world).⁷² It is conceivable that eschatological hope for a heavenly feast is essential to our selfless recognition of others in their need (though again, it is unclear how one might *argue* for this position). On this picture, a certain anticipation and participation in the resurrection is the basis for the appearance of human others in their dignity, since all are made for and called to the feast, and as such are good. In Milbank’s words, “to be ethical ... is to believe in the Resurrection, and somehow to participate in it.”⁷³

At this point one might ask what is at stake in the decision for or against the universality of reciprocity, after all. Is it necessary that Milbank give arguments in the affirmative on this point, in order to secure a defence against unilateralism? If it assumed that Milbank does in fact show that (i) far from contradicting the first gift, receiving the gift(s) of the other is *compatible* with generosity, and is even an *important* way of being generous, what need does Milbank have of showing also that (ii) such receptivity is *essential* to generosity, or to the ethical movement in general? Why not settle for a position closer to that of von Hildebrand—that there are various expressions of love, and that the perfection characterising one expression would represent a fault if present in the other? Here, in the face of Milbank’s attempt to gather love together under the rubric of reciprocity, one might assert that love is irreducibly diverse, or even remain agnostic in respect to whether love can be gathered together in such a way.

⁷² This might be seen as a partial rejoinder to one of the objections made above in §2.3. (that Milbank does not distinguish between wanting communion *with* the other, and wanting communion *for* the other).

⁷³ *BR*, 148. A charitable reading of this would be as follows. Even atheists can and do act ethically, but to the extent that they are ethical, they implicitly affirm the truth of resurrection and are not pure atheists.

These questions are not addressed here. In the rest of this chapter, the relation established in *BR* between grace and gift-exchange is explored further. This aspect of Milbank's account of gift-exchange is contrasted with the narratives of Mauss (next section) and of Marion (bringing the chapter to its conclusion).

2.7. Milbank's Response to Marcel Mauss

A later chapter of *BR* titled, "Politics: Socialism by Grace"⁷⁴ is intended to correct the unilateralist reaction against certain problematic elements of Maussian gift-exchange. Consider, for example, Marcel Mauss' anthropological descriptions of "potlatch", a grandiose display of wealth recklessly spent. Here Mauss associates the offering of gifts—and this includes the "total prestation" in which one tribe acts as donor in relation to another—with the polemical struggle for power and glory, both within and between tribes:

[T]he remarkable thing about these tribes is the spirit of rivalry and antagonism which dominates all their activities ... Essentially usurious and extravagant, [potlatch] is above all a struggle among nobles to determine their position in the hierarchy ...⁷⁵

[F]or the Kwakiutla, Haida and Tsimshian ... [t]he person who cannot return a loan or potlatch loses his rank and even his status of a free man.⁷⁶

Milbank himself finds certain elements of Maussian exchange to be problematic. His celebration of gift-exchange, then, should not be read as an unequivocal embrace of archaic modes of gift-giving:

[H]owever much we may celebrate the archaic gift, its reverse aspect, or the reverse aspect of organic collective identity, was always war with the other, not to mention the many ways in which gift-giving was used (as hierarchy tended to increase) to secure arbitrary power

⁷⁴ *BR*, 162-86.

⁷⁵ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*, 4. It should be pointed out that the winner in this struggle is not always the "individual" but is often the "clan". This struggle is "to the ultimate benefit ... of their own clans" (4).

⁷⁶ Mauss, *The Gift*, 41.

within the clan itself. The gift-community possessed automatically its own form of violence.⁷⁷

Here Milbank points out that the practices of individualism (“liberalism”) and communitarianism (“organicism”) are equally wanting; both are said to “exclude community”.⁷⁸ The problem with the “archaic” gift is that the final context or horizon for its non-identical repetition is constrained within a *particular* community—which for that reason is “organically” fused, and so violently opposed to the “beyond”.⁷⁹ The answer, however, is not the “replacement of the gift with contract ... which means the treating of all and everyone as a stranger”. For this entails “another and equally terrible, though more subtle form of violence”.⁸⁰ Milbank’s “third way” is to expand the horizon of non-identical repetition *indefinitely*—beyond every local community, and, in regard to a given community, beyond every finite extension or configuration of that community.⁸¹ Priority is given to exchange and therefore to encounter and “what breaches, what flows into a thing and out again.”⁸² Thus strangers and “arrivees are the only people to have community with.”⁸³

The rest of this section consists of two points of clarification in respect to the above. *First*, to adopt this vision of gift-exchange is not to undo the specific character of every local *topos* and society for the sake of some homogenous super-community. Communities are still

⁷⁷ *BR*, 168.

⁷⁸ “[T]he human problem is this: how to escape Scylla and Charybdis? That is to say, both organic community and alienated contract, remembering that both are modes of ‘individualism’, and both exclude community.” *BR*, 169.

⁷⁹ Milbank points out the limits of “tight communities possessing strong familiarity of blood and tight expectations of what would be appropriate gifts. Despite the definition of gift with reference to the non-identical counter-gift ... the archaic gift sustained the same fetish, the same story of the same cycle of giving through all its exchanges. It moved in an organic circle, and outside that circle, for the purpose of trade with strangers, barter or early forms of contract were already resorted to.” *BR*, 167-68.

⁸⁰ *BR*, 168.

⁸¹ *BR*, 165. In this context Milbank cites Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*; Maurice Blanchot, *La Communauté Inavouable* (Paris: Editions du Minuit, 1983); Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. M. Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993). He also refers to “natality” in Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1958); *Between Past and Future* (New York: Columbia UP, 1961).

⁸² *BR*, 165. “[T]he truth, throughout all nature, is that every totality is continuously breached, and is always already breached—or, one might say, is always involved in an exchange beyond itself, not within an ultimate circle, but within an unending chain of exchanges throughout space and time” (165).

⁸³ [C]ommunity *needs* strangers, *these are* the only available neighbours. It is not that they need to be received *into* the community, it is rather that arrivees are always the only people to have community with ...” *BR*, 169. Milbank’s emphasis.

relatively self-sufficient for Milbank: “[I]f the libertarians tend to underestimate the important of *relative* self-sufficiency to real community, the communitarians overestimate it...”⁸⁴ In other words, the event of society and gift-exchange does not *undo* difference (and distance), but rather *affirms* it (and this is no less true for the difference between individuals). Parochialism is rejected in favour of, not homogenous universalism, but a harmonious blending of differences—an “analogical universalism” (to appropriate Aquinas)⁸⁵ or simply “Peace” (Milbank’s Augustine).⁸⁶

Milbank appeals to the universal in order to account for reconciliation also. According to this theologian, forgiveness is the restoration of community and is therefore a renewal of gift-exchange; it is not simply a unilateral act of pardon (this is actually the central thesis of *BR*). Reconciliation, as a form of gift-exchange, is an event of interpersonal unity:

To receive forgiveness ... is also to receive the gift of identity with the giver, an identity of shared character, idiom, ethos or tropos which still respects independence of will—although the wills unite in a shared intention.⁸⁷

However, and to repeat, the *ultimate* principle of unity is for Milbank *not simply* “local” belonging (though this is no less important for him⁸⁸); such would mean an ontology of

⁸⁴ *BR*, 165.

⁸⁵ “‘[L]ove’ is complexly spoken of and exemplified just because it is an incurably imprecise analogical concept that indicates no reality other than the mysterious fact that certain diverse experiences and feelings appear, all the same, characteristically to blend together to form a certain loose unity. Indeed one can go further: if the state of love between creatures itself characteristically blends differences within a kind of mysterious identity, does not love as such lie close to the cognitive experience of analogical unity?” “The Gift and the Mirror”, 259-260.

⁸⁶ “... Plato, with his notion of the Good as a transcendent plenitude which we partially recollect only through *ever new* occasions for recollection encountered in a forward movement in time, is much closer to grasping ‘ineffable community’ than Aristotle. Augustine gave this intrinsic quality its perhaps only possible general name—which is ‘Peace’; but like St Paul, he did not take this as something one could contrive, or formally plan for. Instead it is what arises ‘by grace’ as a thousand different specific models of social harmony, a thousand different gifts of specific social bonding, a thousand kinds of community.” *BR*, 167. Milbank’s emphasis.

⁸⁷ “Where people differ, struggle and quarrel, then finally the only solution is to become one flesh [!], to forge one shared identity, one harmony, one tone, one flavour, which does not mean that asymmetrical contributions to this are denied ... [R]econciliation is the absoluteness of shared taste, the freedom of the dance in joint measure ...” *BR*, 70. “One flesh” is not to be taken in the more literal sense; I presume Milbank does not mean that the only way to reconcile with one’s enemy is to have sexual relations!

⁸⁸ “Affinity or ontological kinship is a kind of aesthetic of co-belonging of some with some, and so ultimately of all with all, not formally and indifferently (as if every person were equally near every other...) but via the mediation of degrees of preferences.” *BR*, 204.

exclusion and the inevitability of violence between clans. By invoking a “higher” principle of unity (a “higher nature”), Milbank indicates the possibility of a universal yet non-totalitarian unity:

[T]here can only be *love*, if there is ecstatic reciprocity and interplay of characters who naturally ‘belong together’. In this way, the chain of affinity, beyond nature [i.e. the ties of family and clan], discovers a higher nature (the supernatural, the gift of grace).⁸⁹

The *second* point is as follows. To open the non-identical repetition of gift to an “infinite horizon” in this way, is not to succumb to a certain “nihilism”. Appealing to the infinite need not undo the rhythm or spirit of the gift. For Milbank does not understand infinity as the lack or negation of all form. Such would entail that diverse attitudes and comportments toward gift (e.g. gratitude versus ingratitude) could not, in principle, be ranked in terms of their appropriateness.⁹⁰ Arguably, this would only “denature” the gift, and with it, the bond made between participants in gift-exchange. While the depth and goodness of the gift requires the possibility of its being varied through time in unpredictable ways,⁹¹ there is still a certain “semi-ineffable”⁹² form or rhythm that exchange of gift manifests, ever-differently. Milbank thus writes of

a universal practice of offering ... in the expectation or at least hope of receiving back not a price due to us, but others themselves in their counter-gifts, because we aim for reciprocity, for community, and not for a barren and sterile self-sacrifice ...⁹³

⁸⁹ *BR*, 203. Milbank’s emphasis.

⁹⁰ On this point, Marion is more in agreement when compared with Derrida. See note 3 above. Regarding infinity, Milbank contrasts ancient Greek *apeiron* with the Christian divine love and Trinity. The former he associates with the “ontology of strife”, the latter with an “ontology of peace.” Heidegger’s thinking of Being is said to be an instance of the former. See “The Double Glory,” 135, 147-149, and *TST2*, 295-317. Milbank critiques “the priority of the possible” in his “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics”. Compare *RONT*, 1-2. “What finally distances [Radical Orthodoxy] from nihilism is its proposal of the rational possibility, and the faithfully perceived actuality, of an indeterminacy that is not impersonal chaos but infinite interpersonal harmonious order, in which time participates.” Refer also to §2.9.1. and §7.5. below.

⁹¹ “[T]he sacred ineffability of the gift is more sustained where a horizon of unknown variation is allowed, but this horizon can only be envisaged under the Sun of transcendence.” *BR*, 171.

⁹² *BR*, 166. This is a qualification of Blanchot’s apophatics of community.

⁹³ *BR*, 169.

On this view, the gift released for another is nonetheless bound to the giver, such that it calls for certain fitting responses. To appropriate an insight of Gadamer, the offering of gift opens a field of play within which the recipient is called to respond.⁹⁴ While there is room for unpredictable variation and therefore personal appropriation⁹⁵ of the relation opened by gift, such *Spielraum* (literally: play-room) is necessary opened *within certain determinate limits*.⁹⁶

Elaborating on this further, it would seem that these limits are given by the nature of gift as such, but also by the specific character and context of each performance of gift. But the limitations imposed by gift—limitations that are also an opportunity—are not just a function of the “matter” of the gift (a gift of perfume can only be used and enjoyed in particular ways, while tickets to a opera can only be used in another particular way). If these were the only limits that came with the material gift, and the only limits to which the recipient were “true”, then the recipient would not participate in the *meaning* of the gift as such. There would not be any important difference between, say, a woman’s comportment to the perfume which she chose and bought herself, autonomously, and her comportment to the perfume which awaits her, wrapped in ribbon, as a gift from her lover.

The lover’s gift of perfume certainly imposes material limits (it is perfume, not chocolate), but its function as a gift is (in this case) to “reach” the beloved as a sign of love, to “touch” her romantically. If the beloved sees and accepts this perfume as a gift—and moreover, as a

⁹⁴ “To be dependent on self-presentation belongs to what it [the work of art] is. This means that however much it is transformed and distorted in being presented, it still remains itself. *This constitutes the obligation of every presentation: that it contain a relation to the structure itself and submit itself to the criterion of correctness that derives from it* ... Inescapably, the presentation has the character of a repetition of the same. Here ‘repetition’ does not mean that something is literally repeated—i.e., can be reduced to something original. Rather, every repetition is as original as the work itself.” Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), 122. My emphasis.

⁹⁵ “[I]n the middle of history, Gierke identified something else [than *Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft*; ancient and modern society, pagan myth and secular reason]; the *free-associations*, or relational unity with the other, whose near-oxymoronic character allows it to be brought into conjunction with the gift, which is somehow at once *free in relation to* and yet also *bound to the other*.” *BR*, 169. Milbank’s emphasis.

⁹⁶ I am indebted to Prof. Jeff Malpas for the relation between space and limit. Cf. Jeff Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006).

gift from *this* person, *rather than another*—then she allows herself to be “reached” and “touched” by her lover (and hopefully, for the giver, she does not imagine it was the gift of some *other* giver!). She understands, with a smile, the thought and feeling that inspired this gift, and allows herself to become the beloved woman that the gift signifies. Hence, there is a *particular* relational aspect to this reception of gift which is not present in the autonomous buying and using of perfume, even if the latter is an expression of a certain feminine self-awareness (“I am worth it”) and certainly has relational elements (“this perfume will enhance my beauty for ...”). If the gift is accepted, it would be inappropriate to sell the perfume for money (except perhaps in exceptional circumstances, and even then, *reluctantly*), or to never give a thought to the giver when dealing with the perfume. More precisely, such “inappropriate” responses would already prove that the gift is not accepted *as* a gift (at least not properly and fully).

However, for Milbank, the unpredictable yet fitting “repetition” of gift concerns not *just* the manner in which *particular* gifts are intended and “taken”. As already shown, it concerns also the rhythm by which plural gifts are exchanged *one after the other* through time (between lovers, between family members, between friends, between benefactor and beneficiary, between countries, etc.), according to semi-determinate “fields of response” that open in diverse relationships.

In sum, Milbank’s “third way” beyond unilateralism on one hand (Derrida, also Marion) and a *finite* horizon of gift-exchange on the other (Mauss), is an eschatological vision of an ever-expanding horizon of gift-exchange. His method is to think beyond “totality” or “strict self-identity” (in both its singular and communal guises) by stressing the “priority of what breaches”. Persons and communities never coincide with themselves (which is not to say that

they have no particularity or specificity); they are what they are by non-identical repetition,⁹⁷ and therefore by virtue of continual encounter and exchange. The final context of gift-exchange is unbound—pragmatically (for an identity sought in a *bound* horizon ends up contradicting the conditions under which it is properly renewed through time) and therefore normatively.

2.8. Reciprocity and the Gifting of Subjectivity

2.8.1. *Against Milbank*

As shown above, Milbank links the graced arrival and renewal of the relational subject, with the exchange of gifts. The converse of this link is expressed when Milbank associates unilateralism with a non-ecstatic or “self-possessed” subject:

[T]he idea of a fundamentally sacrificial, or unilateral gift, makes absolute one’s inalienable self-possession of a will to sacrifice and so *preserves* the Hellenic notion of the ethical as the overcoming of moral luck ...⁹⁸

This claim appears rather hasty and so calls for evaluation. The phenomenology of call and response *defines* the work of both Lévinas and Marion, and is the basis of their diverse attempts to *overcome* the reign of the self-possessed “subject”.⁹⁹ Whatever might be the source of the call according to the phenomenologies of Lévinas and Marion, and however the call might be said to be mediated to the one called (the “interlocuted”), it is clear that in both cases the latter’s response-ability, his/her concrete ability to respond, is received in and as the call itself—the respondent, *qua* respondent, is *called forth* (§26 of *Being Given* is entitled,

⁹⁷ Milbank, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard” in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 131-156.

⁹⁸ *BR*, 155. Milbank’s emphasis.

⁹⁹ See Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*; Marion, *Being Given*, 248-319, “The Final Appeal of the Subject” in John Caputo (ed.), *The Religious*, 131-44, and “The Banality of Saturation” in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences*, 383-418, esp. 387; Ian Leask, “The Dative Subject (and the ‘Principle of Principles’)” in Leask and Cassidy (eds), *Givenness and God*, 182-89. See also Janicaud, “The Theological Turn”; Jean-Luc Nancy (ed.), *Who Comes after the Subject?* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Jean-Louis Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*, trans. Anne A. Davenport (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004).

“To Receive One’s Self From What Gives Itself”). In what sense, if any, might it be true that the admittedly unilateral nature of the *response* to the call in Lévinas and/or Marion, “makes absolute one’s inalienable self-possession of a will to sacrifice”?¹⁰⁰

It will be simpler to focus just on Marion. The sentence quoted above ends as follows: “...even if, or *especially* if, this identity is construed, as with Marion, as the debt to a giver which inaugurates subjectivity as such (for this subjectivity supposedly outside all agency and judgement is thereby all the more inviolable).”¹⁰¹ What might Milbank mean by “outside all agency and judgement”? Does he mean to say that Marion’s “subject” has an inviolable core, which is not touched by anyone else’s agency and judgement? In some ways, this accords with the claim that Marion’s “subject” continues the modern overcoming of moral luck in favour of individual autonomy. However, another interpretation better fits the text. Milbank understands Marion’s notion of an “indebted” or “interlocuted” subject as the outcome of a reaction against absolutely autonomous activity (that of a subject which gives itself to itself and for itself) in favour of “existential passivity” (that of a subject which receives itself in the call, as one claimed for something Other). On Milbank’s reading, this subjectivity is “supposedly outside all agency and judgement”. It is “inaugurated” without the subject’s doing; in no way does it create itself or discern (judge) who or what it is to be—not even responsively, in the middle voice.

Milbank finds Marion’s (supposed) retreat to pure passivity just as problematic as the purely active reading of subjectivity. If the latter understanding of the subject implies self-possession and the “overcoming of moral luck”, so too does Marion’s. For a subject that does not interpret and create itself through time, in the middle voice, by participating in divine

¹⁰⁰ *BR*, 155.

¹⁰¹ *BR*, 155. Milbank’s emphasis.

truth and creativity, would already be itself *independently* of any hermeneutic, narrative, performance or encounter. To be given ek-sistence in a purely passive mode is to be “inviolable” as a subject, since in that case one is unable to actively receive oneself through time and with others.

Two points can be made in response to Milbank’s reading of Marion here. First, it is doubtful that Marion refuses the middle voice, or that he simply shuttles between pure activity and pure passivity as Milbank contends. For Marion, the call is properly received in and as one’s response.¹⁰² Moreover, for this phenomenologist, things are not “given” in such a way as to make continual interpretation and appropriation unnecessary. If givenness arrives “passively” (from the perspective of the subject), if it precedes and makes possible the act of interpretation, that is not to say that things are pre-given with some clear and distinct objective presence. For Marion, the givenness of things calls for infinite interpretation.¹⁰³ Here it is important to understand the way in which a philosopher intends his or her words. If Marion has a doctrine of “givenness” that does not necessary mean that he subscribes to “the myth of the Given” (this point is returned to shortly).

Second, in any case it is hard to see how *even a moment* of pure passivity could be avoided by a subject who is said to receive things (and itself) in the middle voice. A good case can be made for this as follows. To begin, it is asked whether the call arrives at the subject and claims it (1) *without* the subject’s doing (in the active *or* middle voice) or instead (2) *with* it? To concede to (1) is to agree to a moment of pure passivity. And this appears to be compatible with the middle voice after all. For to concede that the subject has no part to play in its being-called to begin with, is not to say that it does not then appropriate this call (or

¹⁰² Marion, *Being Given*, §28 (pp. 282-296).

¹⁰³ Marion, *Being Given*, 229; see also his *In Excess*, 33.

rather, expropriate itself to this call) by responding, in the middle voice (assuming there occurs a response). Option (1) has this at least in favour of it.

What if, instead, it is claimed that (2) the subject's act *is* already involved in the arrival of the call, such that without this act, the subject would not be "touched" by the call at all (claimed, prompted, empowered to respond)? A further question then arises. In virtue of what, was the subject able to act in this way? Was this act made possible by the call or not? Was this act (2a) a *response* to the call—one that follows the call's movement, or continues its destining, releasing only the dynamism that the call entrusts to the one called? Or (2b) did this act rather add something to the call independently, from without?

To opt for (2a) is to think the relation between the call and the response in two incompatible ways at once. On one hand, the state of being-called is *presupposed* by the response, while on the other, the state of being-called *already includes* the actual response. To avoid this result, one might distinguish between (i) a state of being-called that precedes the response, and (ii) a state of being-called that includes the actual response. But to allow for (i) is already to concede that there is a moment of pure passivity, in accordance with (1). To save (2a) by modifying it thus, is to make it disappear as an option distinct from (1).¹⁰⁴

What, then, of option (2b)—the subject's act *is* already involved in the arrival of the call, such that without this act, the subject would not be "touched" by the call at all, but where this act is *not* a response to the call? In that case, there would be a moment of autonomy in the human subject that is *not* given in the call (assuming only one call is in question). But this is against Marion's approach in *Being Given*, and Milbank does not object to this aspect of

¹⁰⁴ Perhaps another sense of being-called might be introduced here, one that does not denote any modification or undergoing in the one called. A theological example: one might admit a sense in which "being called to love God" is not a *passio* in the one called, but simply indicates God's will and favour in respect to the one called (See Aquinas, *ST* I-II, Q. 110, a. 1, objection 1). However, if this call does not *also* reach and "touch" or "modify" the one called, it is hard to see how the latter's active love for God, if it occurred, could be a *response* to God's call.

Marion's work. Furthermore, it is hard to see what it might mean to act *non-responsively* so as to be conditioned by the call, or even what advantage there might be in allowing for this possibility. There does not appear to be any way that Milbank could create an objection to Marion's pure passivity by drawing upon this option. Therefore, (2b) can safely be excluded.

In conclusion, neither (2a) nor (2b) appears to be a distinct and acceptable option for a coherent understanding of the called subject. This leaves only (1), which *does* appear acceptable. The upshot of this result is as follows. To emphasise the utter passivity of being-called as Marion does, does not necessarily mean that one has not given due attention to responsiveness, or to the middle voice. For it can be argued that a certain moment of pure passivity in the subject is the *condition* for responding in the middle voice. If this is true, then a more charitable reading of Marion is called for, and *Milbank* turns out to be the one who has failed to think the middle voice properly. Milbank has not arrived at the distinction between "pre-medial" passivity (the passivity that leads into and is the condition of medial response, as above) and a *passio* that does *not* lead into medial response. By ascribing to Marion a "dialectical shutting" between the active and passive voices, perhaps Milbank actually charges *himself* with missing the subtleties of the middle voice (as well as the subtleties of Marion's narrative).

It is also the contention of Shane Mackinlay that the phenomenology in question fails to find "a middle way between the active and passive voices." For this Australian priest and contemporary Marion scholar, such a fault follows inevitably from Marion's excessive "insistence on the initiative ... of phenomena":

Marion excludes acts of interpretation from the actual happening of events. In place of Heidegger's ontological (or existential) sense of hermeneutics, where hermeneutics is intrinsic to the actual happening of phenomena, Marion confines hermeneutics to a marginal

and derivative sense of ‘subsequent interpretation’—after phenomena have already appeared.¹⁰⁵

However, the same response just given above can be applied here. Does Mackinlay mean to say that acts of interpretation are unable, in principle, to bring the truth of things into “birth”, mediately—that interpretation is never “midwifery” that “lets happen” the event of truth in language? Presumably not, for such a position would not find a “middle way between the active and passive voices” either. But, as already suggested, it is hard to see how interpretation *could* “make way” for the presencing of things *if the truth of things were not already, though obscurely, beginning to surge into presence*—bearing upon us already so that we might “go along” with this presencing in the act of interpretation, and so bring to completion the event of truth.¹⁰⁶ Thus it appears that the middle voice presupposes a moment or phase of passivity after all. If for Marion interpretation is “subsequent” to the self-initiating givenness of things, perhaps this “givenness” should not be confused with the “clear appearance of phenomena” whose occurrence already includes the act of interpretation. The first may well signify some sort of passive union between subject and phenomena (non-activity of the *subject*, self-giving of/as *phenomenon*), while the latter signifies a co-operative union in the middle voice (the interpreting subject actively giving way to what gives itself).

2.8.2. *Against Marion*

Given these two objections to Milbank’s dismissal of Marion, is there *anything* to be said in favour of the claim under question (“the idea of a fundamentally sacrificial, or unilateral gift, makes absolute one’s inalienable self-possession of a will to sacrifice and so *preserves* the

¹⁰⁵ Shane Mackinlay, “Phenomenality in the Middle: Marion, Romana, and the Hermeneutics of the Event” in Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (eds), *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 167-81, esp. 172. Compare Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”.

¹⁰⁶ A similar reading of interpretation is even to be found in Milbank, “Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi” in *RONT*, 21-37.

Hellenic notion of the ethical as the overcoming of moral luck or the arrival of that which unperturbably belongs to one”)?¹⁰⁷ Even if it is granted that Milbank’s reading of Marion is unfair on these two counts, an important objection can still be saved, it seems. But to anticipate, this turns out not to be the same objection with which we began.

First, recall that for Milbank (according to the reading offered above), a subject that did not interpret and create itself through time, in the middle voice, by participating in divine truth and creativity, would already be itself *independently* of any hermeneutic, narrative, performance or encounter. To be given ek-sistence in a purely passive mode is to be “inviolable” as a subject, since in that case one would be unable to actively receive oneself through time and with others. Now in relation to this, Marion’s position is two-sided. On one hand, to admit a moment of pure passivity for the called subject does *not* imply the negation of the claim that the subject interprets and creates itself through time, in the middle voice, as Milbank seems to think. For if the passivity admitted is “pre-medial” (see *For Marion*), then it is *not* implied that the subject is fully itself independently of any hermeneutic, narrative, performance or encounter.

On the other hand, the following still seems to count *against* Marion (whether this objection can be assimilated to the objection that appealed to “inviolability” and “moral luck”, is another matter). While Marion’s called subject may well be called to receive the gift of itself through time, and in the middle voice, a question mark is nonetheless placed over the possibility of receiving, though time, and in the middle voice, the gift of oneself *from others and with others*. For, as already shown, Marion takes the reception of gratitude, counter-gift and/or union with the other, as a movement that contravenes the pure loss that would supposedly be involved in giving the gift.

¹⁰⁷ BR, 155. Milbank’s emphasis.

To be sure, Marion does not claim that persons, or more precisely, those who (at least seemingly) offer gifts, cannot possibly be affected by others in an enjoyable and/or beneficial way. The whole purpose of *Being Given* is to find an *alternative* stance, one which might escape this *all-too-possible* economy of gift and counter-gift. The latter economy is transcended, and the ideal mode of gifted-and-giving subjectivity is realised, on condition that the called subject hopes for nothing, and is granted nothing, in return for his/her gifts—nothing which might represent a “gain” or “recompense”, even in the form of recognition. The *an-economic* gift is the gift in its purity; the gift is reduced (in a positive sense) to sheer “givenness” or “being-given”, on condition that it is absolved from the worldly economy of exchange—that horizon which would reduce it (in a negative sense) to mere presence, mere capital, mere object.¹⁰⁸ In short, the subject—or whoever comes “after” the subject, “after” metaphysics—partakes in the gift most properly by transcending presence and economy.

But does this not imply that the called subject’s agency as (self-sacrificial) giver is *not* fully relational after all, since it is *not* continually and differently received from others in the dialogical context of gift-exchange? While on Marion’s picture, the call draws one into an “eventful” temporality, in which each moment arrives as gift and claims the subject into ek-sistence again, the claiming and renewing power of this (vertical?) call *still bypasses the horizontal dimension*, and this necessarily.¹⁰⁹ Milbank’s lesson, then, might be that properly overcoming the fully autonomous subject requires more than simply the notion of

¹⁰⁸ Marion, *Being Given*, 77-85, 113-18.

¹⁰⁹ For Marion on the event of gift, see *Being Given*, §14. “Unpredictable landing—not the uniform arrival, but the unforeseen, spastic, and discontinuous arising of appearing—in the end emphasizes that the given gives *itself* ... [S]uch ... necessarily implies what, in metaphysical terms, is called a contingency—that the phenomenon appear, here and now, not before and after, undoubtedly never again in this way, undoubtedly for the first time ... Unpredictable landing unfolds givenness by delivering the ineluctability of the arising and, inseparably, its unforeseeable and unproducible initiative. In effect, givenness accomplishes its primacy in that it lets the given vibrate with an essential remainder that it neither can nor should ever erase, since it belongs to it intrinsically in the role of showing *itself*, of giving *itself* ... That is, arriving as a *self* that cannot be predicted or produced, in conforming with its arising, the given takes a position temporally ... The given remains the same only for the moment of its happening” (138-9). Obviously “self” should not be misunderstood here. Also, the word “givenness” does not mean neutral, inert, presence-at-hand as it does for Milbank; see *Being Given*, 66-68.

“giftedness” or “being-called”. According to this critique, it must *also* be admitted that one’s reception of oneself by exposure to grace/gift can be, and ought to be, *positively mediated by the presence and acts of concrete others*—others in the flesh and in the world.

For reasons outlined in this and previous sections, it is not clear that Marion’s called subject is “inviolable”, or that his/her will to self-sacrifice is unaffected by moral luck or grace. However, it is still possible with Milbank to object to the manner in which Marion thinks the *mediation* of grace or gift to the subject. Marion’s affirmation of pure gift proceeds by *negating* “presence” and “economy.” Milbank’s response is to affirm reciprocal gift by *transfiguring* presence and economy. In explanation of this, it is necessary to turn to Milbank’s appeal to “paradox” as an alternative to Marion’s “dialectic”.

2.9. “Paradox” versus “Dialectic”

2.9.1. *Truth and Beauty 1: Against Kant*

Milbank argues that to transcend economy and presence methodologically, in favour of *pure* gift or love (as opposed to *re-thinking* economy and presence in terms of their radical *participation* in love and gift) is problematic in *two* related ways, in fact. If transcendence performed in this “reactive” manner leaves the subject with a certain “Protestant” privacy and autonomy (the conclusion of the previous section), it equally leaves the world (physical, political, social and economic) nihilistically devoid of the intimations of truth, goodness and beauty:¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ Milbank argues for a link between these two results in “The Double Glory”, 123ff: “Lacan himself is quite clear: reciprocity in love is impossible within a disenchanted cosmos” (123).

[T]he consequence of Marion's bleakly Pascalian view that the order of love ... lies entirely above and beyond being, power, and knowledge could be that we must hand the physical world, political society, and positive or humane science over to an inevitable lovelessness ...¹¹¹

Milbank associates such a view with the Kantian separation of phenomena and noumena,¹¹² and advocates in its stead a theology of *methexis*. For this theologian, the entire world, in all its natural and humane dimensions, participates in the divine, and therefore in the transcendental perfections, in order to be at all.¹¹³

Milbank claims that this view simply continues the ontological use that Thomas Aquinas made of *methexis*:

The ruling principle of this philosophy or theology, which is derived directly from the Thomist real distinction [between *essentia* and *esse*], is the paradoxical "superaddition of the most inward and essential," in continuity with the ideas of the neoplatonist Proclus, who proclaimed ... that the highest cause always works within things "more inwardly" than lower causes.¹¹⁴

Thus far, such a reading of Aquinas is not controversial. One prominent Catholic scholar agrees that "the fundamental significance of participation in Aquinas' thought, first 'discovered' by Geiger and Fabro, has now become generally accepted."¹¹⁵ Regrettably,

¹¹¹ Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror", 254. Here Milbank is responding to Marion, *The Erotic Phenomenon*. This passage echoes one aspect of Milbank's critique of Hegel: "For and Against Hegel" in *TST2*. Milbank finds that Hegel leaves unredeemed the domain of economics; the latter is a "realm of indifference" whose contingent, conflictual processes do not positively manifest the truth of the Absolute. From a different perspective, but for similar reasons, Tillich thinks love and power should be thought in unity: Paul Tillich, *Love, Power and Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1954). See also Milbank, "Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics," *New Blackfriars* 76 (1995), 325-42 [a revised version is included in his *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 36-52] and the editors' introduction, "Suspending the Material", in *RONT*, 1-20. Phillip Blond explains and defends this position (an integrating theological aesthetics) clearly in his "Introduction: Theology Before Philosophy", in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 1-66.

¹¹² See, e.g., Milbank, "Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi" in *RONT*, 21-37; *TST2*, 1ff. Cf. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹¹³ "Participation" is ubiquitous in Milbank's writings. See, e.g., "The Shares of Being", esp. 28-34, 54, and the introductions to *TST2* and *BR*.

¹¹⁴ Milbank, "The Double Glory", 204-5. He cites Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*. The "superaddition of the most inward and essential" is considered also in Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas*.

¹¹⁵ David C. Schindler, "What's the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context" in *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3.1 (2005), 1-27, here, 2. His citations include Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione*

however, Milbank continues as follows. “Thus the *esse* of God gives existence to everything and is the existence of everything, even though ‘existence’ is the enigma most proper to each separate reality.” But this is not correct. Aquinas takes care to distinguish the *esse* proper to the creature from that of God. The Angelic Doctor’s way of avoiding a position which for him would mean, heretically, the collapse of creatures into the divine being, was to affirm that creatures participate in *esse commune*. The latter was taken to include simply, all possible modalities of *created* being. This unity of being was not understood to be divine¹¹⁶ (though it was given *from* God), and indeed was not thought to be proper to any existing thing *at all* (it was merely a “being of reason”).¹¹⁷

“Participation” also has soteriological import in Milbank’s theology:

The traditional participatory view (as summed up in Aquinas) understood that, if creatures are not self-standing, then there is nothing complete and autonomous in finite nature, including especially human nature, which is unaware of its origin ... [T]he creature by his very nature paradoxically longs for and somehow intimates what he cannot know by nature and cannot even intimate by nature alone—namely, his supernatural raising to the vision of God and the status of participated sonship.¹¹⁸

In the context of this discussion, the most conspicuous problem with these uses of “participation” is whether and how one might reconcile the pragmatic and *soteriological* use with the *ontological* use. The former is in play in Milbank’s retrieval of “moral luck” in terms of the *gift* of acting-well—a *grace* which for this theologian is necessarily “fragile”, able to

Secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino, 2nd edn (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1950); L.-B. Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd edn (Paris: Vrin, 1953); Joseph de Finance, *Être et agir* (Paris: P.U.F., 1945).

¹¹⁶ See, e.g. Aquinas, *ST I*. Q. 3 a. 4 ad 1, also a. 8; *SCG I*. ch. 26; *De Potentia* Q. 7 a. 2 ad 4.

¹¹⁷ See John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2000), 110-23, esp. 115. See also Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); W. Norris Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994): 89-101; David C. Schindler, “What’s the Difference?”

¹¹⁸ Milbank, “The Double Glory”, 202. This is Henri de Lubac’s reading of Aquinas in *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed. (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

be gained and also lost. With the latter, by contrast, Milbank affirms that creatures participate in the Good *always and already*, just by being. This problem is related to a Calvinist objection to Milbank's use of participation—if we already partake in God, just by being, what need is there of the redemption offered in Jesus Christ?¹¹⁹ Milbank's response to the latter objection, at least, is to admit different *degrees* of participating in the same God.¹²⁰

However, it is the *phenomenological* use that this theologian makes of “participation” that is of primary interest here. Refusing the critical limits imposed by the Kantian revolution, Milbank claims that the finite is shot through with the suggestive radiance of the infinite (where evil is to be understood as a distorting *privation* of being and truth¹²¹). Hence to (begin to) know any finite thing (or person) is already to have some “obscure” vision of the divine, by way of (intentional) participation. This theological aesthetics is coloured and bolstered in various places with reference to various figures—Meister Eckhart,¹²² Nicholas of Cusa,¹²³ Friedrich Jacobi,¹²⁴ Henri de Lubac¹²⁵ and Merleau-Ponty,¹²⁶ to name some of Milbank's favourites. As for Aquinas, Milbank endorses contemporary French readings

¹¹⁹ This objection is raised by Kevin Vanhoozer in *Remythologizing Theology*, and by others in James K. A. Smith and James H. Olthuis (eds), *Radical Orthodoxy and the Reformed Tradition: Creation, Covenant, and Participation*, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). See also Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville, London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007). See James K. A. Smith, *Speech and Theology: Language and the Logic of Incarnation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 170-82, for the criticism that Platonic *methexis* is against a properly Christian affirmation of the goodness of matter and the body.

¹²⁰ See Milbank, “Intensities”. A more promising suggestion is given in Han-Luen Kantzer Koline, “Finitude in *The Beauty of the Infinite*: A Theological Assessment and Proposal”, *Heythrop Journal* (2009), 806-818. In response to David Bentley Hart's book, Koline calls for “distinctions between the type of participation of the finite in the infinite given by the *analogia entis*, described in this article as *methexis*, and a kind of participation that might be designated by the biblical term *koinonia*. Whereas platonic *methexis* is an ontological category of participation given in and necessary for existence, *koinonia* could be articulated as the participation made possible through the once and for all, and therefore continual, action of divine self-giving in Christ” (816).

¹²¹ See Milbank, “Evil: Darkness and Silence” in *BR*, 1-25.

¹²² E.g. “The Double Glory”, 173-5, 187-94, 202-15; *TST2*, xxvi-xxxi.

¹²³ E.g. “The Double Glory”, 167-8, 177, 183, 191-2.

¹²⁴ E.g. “Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi”. “The Kantian view that we perceive only within a supposed legal constitution of the finite is a false modesty that must turn dialectically into a Promethean hubris: since, if the finite does not convey some inkling of the infinite, it might as well be a finitude our subjectivity has somehow constructed and the infinite might as well be the transsubjective abyss our subjectivity emerges from and again negatively projects” (27).

¹²⁵ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*; *TST2*, xxii-xxv; also *RONT*, 2.

¹²⁶ E.g. “The Double Glory”, 124; “The Gift and the Mirror”, 270; “The Soul of Reciprocity, Part Two”. See also note 37 above.

influenced by phenomenology.¹²⁷ He refers to the “‘phenomenological’ dimension implicit in Aquinas (and in Anselm, following Augustine), which assumes that to grasp a perfection *is* to see the infinite shining through the finite and calling the finite above itself’.”¹²⁸

Some critical comments are in order before continuing. When reading Milbank’s work, often one has the impression that his readings of a wide array of philosophers and theologians are not always careful or balanced, and that the insights of diverse thinkers are dissolved together in a syncretist “soup” intended to revive the contemporary mind. Such an impression is readily explained by this theologian’s programmatic *modus operandi*. On the whole, Milbank’s writings, from *Theology and Social Theory* (1990) to the latest essays appearing in *Modern Theology*, assume the same overall pattern and style—the one grand theological vision is presented and re-presented (and purified further) in a series of manifestos, each of which is meant to refute, once and for all (and often by internal critique) the next “fashionable” development in high thought and culture. Each time, a theological vision is bequeathed to the reader, shining forth as the unique way of avoiding the meaninglessness that would follow inexorably from the particular position(s) that Milbank is critiquing.¹²⁹

This theologian’s reading of *Aquinas* has attracted the most critical attention by far. According to one recent critique, Milbank’s fiercely anti-Kantian stance (there is no neat division between the phenomenal and the noumenal; the finite is embedded ontologically and phenomenally in the infinite) is the main factor at work in Milbank’s distorted reading of Aquinas. Amongst other things Milbank incorrectly attributes to Aquinas an obscure intuition

¹²⁷ See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 79-103. “[O]ther recent (mainly lay) Catholic historians of philosophy and theology, often linked to an interest in phenomenology (Courtine, Boulnois, Marion, Schmutz, Lacoste), have tended to confirm a more radical reading of de Lubac and to argue that such a reading can be rooted in Aquinas himself” (88).

¹²⁸ *BR*, 77. “[Duns Scotus] interprets Anselm’s *Monologion* to mean that we know God in terms of infinite degrees of perfection that we grasp in their simple essence quite apart from God, arguing that to refer a perfection analogously to God adds nothing to our knowledge of this perfection. This totally obliterates the ‘phenomenological’ dimension implicit in Aquinas (and in Anselm, following Augustine), which assumes that to grasp a perfection *is* to see the infinite shining through the finite and calling the finite above itself.”

¹²⁹ Thanks are due to Prof. Wayne Hudson for this critical perspective.

of Being and vision of God in this life, and launches misdirected attacks against certain contemporary readers of Aquinas (such as Nicholas Lash). This is not to say that Milbank is wrong to oppose Kant, only that such opposition happens to skew Milbank's readings of Aquinas and others, where perhaps it need not.¹³⁰ This anti-Kantian approach to the phenomenality of things explains Milbank's deep reservation in regard to the method of Jean-Luc Marion and the spirit of much postmodern thought in general:

[T]he truly theological task might be, not to 'relinquish' Being to the realm of reason [as Jean-Luc Marion and others do], but rather to ask whether Being (reality, actuality) ought not itself rather to be approached in the modes of faith, hope, desire, and love. 'Postmodernism,' therefore, does not allow room for theology, and I never sought to speak apologetically in merely postmodern terms.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Paul DeHart, "On Being Heard But Not Seen: Milbank and Lash on Aquinas, Analogy and Agnosticism", *Modern Theology* 26/2 (2010), 243-77 (see his note 59 for important references to Eric Mascall, John of St. Thomas, Jacques Maritain and Bernard Lonergan on the issue of the intuition of Being). Cf. Milbank, "Truth and Vision" in John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19-59; Nicholas Lash, "Where Does Holy Teaching Leave Philosophy? Questions on Milbank's Aquinas," *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 433-444. Denys Turner is critical of Milbank's reading of Aquinas in *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), ch. 10. Milbank's "On 'Thomistic Kabbalah'", *Modern Theology* 27 (2011), 147-85, confirms DeHart's characterisation; here (among other things) Milbank draws on recent French Thomism to continue Jacques Maritain's and John of St. Thomas' readings of Aquinas's epistemology. Here he cites the contemporary French Dominican, Olivier-Thomas Vernard's *Thomas d'Aquin, poète théologien*, vol. 1, *Littérature et Théologie: Une saison en enfer* (Geneva: Ad Solem, 2002). Cf. Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998). Michael Mawson, "Understandings of Nature and Grace in John Milbank and Thomas Aquinas", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009), 347-361, and Wayne Hankey, "Why Philosophy Abides for Aquinas", *Heythrop Journal* 42 (2001): 329-48, show how Milbank's reading of Aquinas on grace is limited; in my opinion this too can be explained by his anti-Kantianism. See also the contributions to Laurence Paul Hemming (ed.), *Radical Orthodoxy? – A Catholic Enquiry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), especially *ibid.*, "Quod Impossibile Est! Aquinas and Radical Orthodoxy", 76-93, and James K.A. Smith, "Faith and Reason Revisited: The Aquinas Case" in his *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 155-66. A positive response to Milbank's reading is found in Mark D. Jordan, *Rewritten Theology: Aquinas After His Readers* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006). See esp. "St Thomas and the Police", 1-17; "Thomas's Alleged Aristotelianism or Aristotle among the Authorities", 60-88; 87n111.

¹³¹ Milbank, "On Theological Transgression" in *The Future of Love*, 145-174, here 158, (see esp. 145-62)]. A similar (i.e., Balthasarian) approach is taken in David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth*. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2003). For an alternative, pro-Kantian approach to theological aesthetics, see Clayton Crockett, *A Theology of the Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2001). Gavin Hyman claims that Milbank's use of the theological metanarrative is problematic, and so finds his work to be not "postmodern" enough. Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology: Radical Orthodoxy or Nihilist Textualism?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). Milbank's response in "On Theological Transgression" (esp. 135), is that his method is to provide only the "formalistic" lineaments of an alternative city of peace, without dictating its essence. See also his responses in *TST2*, vi-xvii, xx-xxii, and Christian Batalden Scharen, "'Judicious Narratives', or Ethnography as Ecclesiology", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 125-142. By contrast, those contributing to Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (eds), *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy: Postmodern Theology, Rhetoric and Truth* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), find Milbank too "postmodern"; they do not appear to accept or appreciate the difference between nihilistic indeterminacy on one hand, and the qualified, beautiful indeterminacy which (according to Milbank et al.) is a function of the *methexis* of being and truth in Trinitarian mystery. See esp. Milbank, "The Double Glory", 160-66; "The Gift and the Mirror", 272; "On Theological Transgression", 153-55.

Milbank refuses, then, to accept a “critical, transcendentalist approach to Being which rigorously issues in the conclusion Being=nothing (as also life=death and time=flux of deferral)”.¹³² Yet he does not mean that Being should be approached through faith, hope and love *as opposed* to reason *per se*; he makes his point only against “reduced” reason, one eschewing these modalities (faith, hope, desire and love). On this integrating vision, Love and Reason are ultimately one in God, in accordance with the Scholastic unity of truth, goodness and beauty:

[A] certain ‘Bonaventurian’ tendency in [Hans Urs von Balthasar’s] work to place the good, love and will ‘beyond’ knowledge is linked to a failure fully to grasp the site of the integrating link of the true, good and beautiful.¹³³

2.9.2. *Truth and Beauty 2: Henri de Lubac and Hans Urs von Balthasar*

The “paradoxical” position adopted here (finite being *and* knowledge are suspended in the divine infinite) is explained clearly and directly in Milbank’s relatively short and unusually readable book, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (2005).¹³⁴ This takes one directly to the heart of Milbank’s thought on the relation between nature and grace; the reader is brought compellingly to the centre of an historically and intellectually complex debate. For Milbank, after de Lubac, the relation between nature and grace is indefinite, in a sense. For in their mutual difference, grace and nature penetrate each other dynamically, from the beginning, such that there is no pure supernatural/theological domain *or* pure natural/philosophical domain from which to describe

¹³² Milbank, “On Theological Transgression”, 158.

¹³³ “Of course the Word is from the outset generated through the out-breathing of Love [the Holy Spirit]. But since the imaging expression of the Father by the Son is perfect, we cannot ever say that love is ‘in excess’ of knowledge, save in the paradoxical sense that infinite knowledge might be in excess of itself.” Milbank, “On ‘Thomistic Kabbalah’”, 151.

¹³⁴ This book has already been cited, but the full reference is given here again. John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

the relation (through either imposed religious dogmatics *or* autonomously rational inquiry, respectively).

[Henri de Lubac] offered neither a philosophy of pure reason, nor a revisionary one based upon faith ... [H]e implicitly proposed a new sort of ontology—indeed, in a sense a ‘non-ontology’—articulated *between* the discourses of philosophy and theology, fracturing their respective autonomies, but tying them loosely and yet firmly together ... This new ontological discourse concerned the paradoxical definition of human nature as intrinsically raised above itself to the ‘super-nature’ of divinity.¹³⁵

This paradoxical relation is said to be a mystery rather than a definite “thesis”; it is more of an “evocation to thought” to be continuously returned to and inhabited, than a relation to be finally mapped. Given that there is no nature that remains unconditioned by the infusion and “lure” of the divine, and inversely no grace that does not, for its effect and expression, rely upon the dynamism of nature which mediates and refracts it (just as artistic work needs expressive media),¹³⁶ the theoretical (and pragmatic) “space” from which to describe (and perform) this relation must also be “metaxological”, occupying the “between” in which uncreated God and created nature interpenetrate.¹³⁷

Milbank thus claims that there can be no purely philosophical preamble to articles of faith, no neutral “ontology” that is universally available and complete by abstraction from theological claims. But inversely (and de Lubac's paradoxical/metaxological way, which is also

¹³⁵ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 5. Milbank's emphasis. On the same page: “The paradoxical expression ‘non-ontology’ seems appropriate because, strictly speaking, the word ‘ontology’ was first used in the seventeenth century to denote a purely philosophical classification of being, cognitively prior to a consideration of the divine) ... Since ... for de Lubac all created nature was in some sense oriented to human nature, this paradoxical structure even extended to the constitution of all finite beings as such.”

¹³⁶ “Grace is always kenotic; the natural is always elevated but not destroyed.” Ibid., 6. “[D]e Lubac saw Maréchal as too much divorcing spirit from its interaction with the material world. His master was rather Maurice Blondel, whose thesis concerned not the straining of spirit beyond finite bounds, but the inadequacy of theoretical understanding to grasp the willed concrete *acts* of the spirit, deemed by Blondel to be comprehensible only by reference to a supernatural lure. Following this model, de Lubac saw that spirit, in exceeding the cosmos and exceeding itself, it always already in practice drawn beyond itself by specific historical mediation. Its cultural self-excess is also the self-excess of grace reaching downwards.” Ibid., 64.

¹³⁷ “For de Lubac the enigma ran equally in two opposite directions. [Hence] the extra-ordinary, the supernatural, which is always manifest within the Creation is present at the heart of the ordinary. It is ‘precisely the real’—or ‘the real in its precision’ as [film director Robert Bresson] put it.” Ibid., 5. Cf. also William Desmond, *God and the Between* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

Milbank's, always includes an “inversely”, for the denial of pure nature “cuts both ways”), one cannot validly and coherently express a theological position without doing ontology (at least implicitly). We cannot properly do theology *after* (in rejection of) ontology, otherwise it will be irrelevant to *beings*, and leave behind an unredeemed, meaningless world.¹³⁸ To be sure, theology, for Milbank, properly eschews “pure” (“pre-theological”) ontology, but the latter is not to be confused with ontology *per se*, such that the latter is reactively rejected *tout court*.¹³⁹

However, Milbank fails to distinguish between the following claims: (i) that the being and truth of things are substantively dependent on, because participating in, divine reality, and (ii) that in order to know things to any degree, one must adopt an explicitly theological stance.¹⁴⁰ This is an important distinction. For against (ii) it is conceivable that there are truths which are accessible in mathematics or in the natural sciences (for example), and which are given (if not fully explained or grounded) independently of any theological position that one might adopt. But this does not necessarily mean, against (i), that anything exists, or even appears, other than by participation in God, however this might be understood. A further point to be made is that Milbank appears to think that “participation in God” could only mean participation in God’s *grace*. But such an equation is problematic, or at least debatable, both in itself and as a reading of Aquinas.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Refer to note 111 above.

¹³⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer deals with these theological issues in a more careful and systematic way in *Remythologizing Theology*. For a critical perspective see Douglas Hedley, “Should Divinity Overcome Metaphysics? Reflections on John Milbank’s Theology beyond Secular Reason and Confessions of a Cambridge Platonist,” in *The Journal of Religion* 80 (2000), 271-98; and Michael Mawson, “Understandings of Nature and Grace in John Milbank and Thomas Aquinas.”

¹⁴⁰ This echoes the distinction made between “formal” and “substantive” autonomy in William J. Meyer, *Metaphysics and the Future of Theology: The Voice of Theology in Public Life* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 397. See James K.A. Smith, “Philosophy and Theology: Anatomy of a Relation” in his *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 166-79 for important distinctions regarding the use of “theology” here.

¹⁴¹ See, e.g., Osborne, “Thomas Aquinas” in *Love of God and Love of Self*, 69-112, esp. 72, 107.

Milbank's theological strategy is also presented clearly in the introduction to his 1990 publication, *Theology and Social Theory*.¹⁴² Here he states that theology's "false humility" before secular theory is "fatal", since "once theology surrenders its claim to be a meta-discourse, it cannot any longer articulate the word of the creator God". Theology then reduces itself to the act of religiously ratifying and "clothing" lesser discourses, such as "historical scholarship, humanist psychology, or transcendental philosophy."¹⁴³ It thus gives up its prerogative of informing—positioning, qualifying and criticising—specific discourses. Since we simply cannot do without an "ultimate organising logic", either theology will position other discourses (Milbank's approach), or it will itself be positioned *by* them in one of two ways. The first of these is the "idolatrous" reduction of the knowledge of God to "some particular immanent field of knowledge"—a supposedly "ultimate" psychological or cosmological principle (e.g., Freudian sex drive, Nietzsche's will-to-power, Marx's dialectical thrust toward socialism). The second of these reacts to the danger of idolatry but within (broadly speaking) the critical limits set by Kant. Knowledge of God is "confined to the intimations of a sublimity beyond representation". But this only confirms negatively the equation of form and representation with rational transparency, thus reinforcing the "questionable idea of an autonomous secular realm."¹⁴⁴

In the tradition of Hans Urs von Balthasar,¹⁴⁵ Milbank upholds the importance of *beauty* as mediating between the infinite and the infinite (as well as between the true and the good). In this way he hopes to escape the dichotomy just presented, between "the way of idolatry" and

¹⁴² This book has already been cited, but the full reference is given here. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006) [*TST2*]. The first edition was published by Blackwell in 1990.

¹⁴³ *TST2*, 1.

¹⁴⁴ *TST2*, 1-2.

¹⁴⁵ See Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord, Volume I: Seeing the Form*, trans. Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, edited by Joseph Fessio, S.J. and John Riches (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1982). Von Balthasar links the division between aesthetic presence and inward religiosity with Kierkegaard (*ibid.*, 49-53). However, see Milbank's *qualified* appropriation of von Balthasar in Milbank, "On 'Thomistic Kabbalah'", 150-1, 181; *TST2*, xxiv-xxxi; *The Suspended Middle*, 62-78; *BR*, x. See also *RONT*, 17-18 (the style of this section of the intro seems to be Milbank's). Also, compare the editor's introduction to Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy*.

“the way of sublimity”. That which appears, or which shows determinate form, is not rationally transparent (fully comprehensible). Rather, as participating in the divine, it radiantly suggests in a particular way the finally ineffable depth of the infinite.

Beauty, linked with participation and liturgy,¹⁴⁶ is therefore crucial to Milbank's evacuation of the “autonomous secular”.¹⁴⁷ Thus, rather than pitting finite presence and the withdrawal of the infinite against each other negatively/dialectically, Milbank thinks in terms of the *paradox of the beautiful*, “the reliance of knowing upon unknowing and vice versa” (coming forward now to a recent publication).¹⁴⁸ That is, the beautiful comes forward in visible form *inasmuch* as it withdraws into mystery, and vice versa:

[W]ithout the ‘misty’ density of things themselves, their formal shapes would proffer to us no definite items. It is therefore material ‘mistiness’ which at once hides and then reveals—and then reveals only through concealing.¹⁴⁹

Beauty lies in this way ‘on the diagonal’ between surface harmony and tantalizing (withheld yet apparent) mystery ... [W]hat is hidden can be further shown and so yet more deeply concealed ... To accept that all truth is mediated by beauty is once more to remain with immediately given paradox. In this instance the paradox is that we can know only the unknowable—that only the vague density of things grants them at once their specificity and their external knowability, so freeing our claims to understand from the taint of solipsistic self-reflection.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Milbank thus approves whole-heartedly the “liturgical turn” made by Catherine Pickstock in *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). See also the appeal to Proclus and theurgy in Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”.

¹⁴⁷ For critiques of Milbank’s polemic against “the secular”, see, e.g., Gavin Hyman, *The Predicament of Postmodern Theology*; Christian Batalden Scharen, “‘Judicious Narratives’, or Ethnography as Ecclesiology”; Wayne J. Hankey and Douglas Hedley (eds), *Deconstructing Radical Orthodoxy*; William J. Meyer, *Metaphysics and the Future of Theology*, 407-81; Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern*.

¹⁴⁸ Milbank, “The Double Glory”, 163.

¹⁴⁹ Milbank, “The Double Glory”, 161. He continues: “Correspondingly, if my thought is to be realistically intentional, if it is to be thought of something, then the very shapes of things which are disclosive for thought return thought to the mystery of the density of background and the density of particular content.”

¹⁵⁰ Milbank, “The Double Glory.” See also “The Gift and the Mirror”, 272. “...Marion’s account of the icon is in fact iconoclastic ... This is inevitable because, for Marion, beauty does not mediate in its visibility the invisible, but rather forecloses a world of idols or of the merely visible and radically finite as reduced to our representing awareness.”

To summarise this section so far: For Milbank, love and gift are not found strictly *on the other side* of worldly presences, as if they were Kantian noumena; nor does the infinite eventuate in the world by way of an *agonistic negation* of objects assumed philosophically to be unilaterally appropriable by the subject (Milbank's reading of Heidegger's ontological difference¹⁵¹). Neither of these options breaks through to the paradox of *appropriation by way of expropriation* (on the side of the "subject") or the *visible presence of withdrawal* (on the side of the "object"). While Milbank has not changed his overall position from *TST* (1990) to "The Double Glory" in *The Monstrosity of Christ* (2009), he may well have broken through to a new clarity regarding the *paradoxical* logic of his position, probably as a result of further acquaintance with Henri de Lubac after *The Suspended Middle*.¹⁵²

2.9.3. Goodness and Gift

A contrast has just been demonstrated between (i) a philosophy which thinks in terms of a "dialectical shuttling" or "oscillation" between tendencies assumed to be really distinct (i.e., neither is thought to be harmoniously mediated and modified by its complement from the beginning) and therefore agonistically opposed (love of self versus love of the other, appropriation versus expropriation, activity versus receptivity, presence versus withdrawal) and (ii) a philosophy which thinks "paradoxically", by taking these moments as logically distinguishable aspects of the *very same* dynamism which is *at peace* with itself in its movement (rather than at *war* with itself¹⁵³). The latter approach, adopted by John Milbank, appears to be a promising way to think of the gift in a non-aporetic and non-unilateralist

¹⁵¹ See, e.g., "The Double Glory," 135, 147-149 and *TST*2, 298-304.

¹⁵² See Milbank, "The Shares of Being", 9ff for the argument that *Lévinas too* fails to think in terms of intermediation/paradox.

¹⁵³ A third option, perhaps, is to think of differing tendencies as distinguishable moments of the *same* dynamism of the *same* infinite (as above) yet narrate this infinite in (Hegelian?) terms of self-rupturing, self-contradiction, virtual or actual war-with-self. However, given that this still contrasts with an ontology of peace, and appears to narrate the infinite in terms of the unstable imposition of two really conflicting tendencies in the Same source, this option can still be called "dialectical" rather than "paradoxical". See the disagreement over difference between Milbank-repeating-Augustine, and Žižek-repeating-Hegel, in Žižek and Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ*.

way—even if Milbank’s use of *methexis* needs nuancing at certain points, and even if he overestimates the degree to which certain historical thinkers subscribe to his own theological vision. Now this contrast is equally applicable to the problematic of reciprocity. Where Marion appears to *oppose* appropriation and expropriation (i.e., in order to overcome the “metaphysical” stance in which the given collapses into something *merely* appropriable-for-the-subject, the given must be seen as a gift whose givenness cannot be accessed by way of appropriation), Milbank *transforms* the notion of appropriation, or retrieves a notion which is adequate *inasmuch as it is paradoxical*—appropriation that appropriates *insofar* as it expropriates (i.e., is obedient to the rhythm of gift; actively lets the gift go on its way).¹⁵⁴

Of course one might object to this opposition. That is, one might take issue with the association of (1) Milbank’s thought with the paradox of “ex-appropriation”,¹⁵⁵ and (2) Marion’s thought with the dialectical shuttling between pure appropriation and pure expropriation, where the latter is favoured reactively over the former. For one might argue that it is precisely the paradox of (1) which Marion is pointing toward in his reflections, though his “post-metaphysical” hyperbole and polemic might give the appearance of (2). However, the following question still needs to be posed to Marion (and this *on top* of the appearance of “dialectic”, not “paradox” in his way of relating the visible and the invisible): Does the arrival and reception of counter-gift *necessarily* mean the collapse of the counter-gift (and therefore of the initial gift) into a contractual economy serving individual egos? If Marion’s response is affirmative—and it surely is—then it is hard to see how his position is

¹⁵⁴ A “dialectical” or irreducibly aporetic approach to the gift is explicitly embraced in Mark Manolopoulos, “Oscillation,” in *If Creation is a Gift*, 89-105. Manolopoulos’ worry is that any harmonized synthesis would mean the *collapse* of one moment or aspect of the gift into the other.

¹⁵⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 80.

“paradoxical” rather than “dialectical”, after all.¹⁵⁶ For once the paradox of ex-appropriation is admitted, there is no reason to think (i) that the offer and reception of counter-gift collapses the gift into the private horizon of the self-serving, identically repeated ego (and equally into the public horizon of contract) rather than think (ii) that the event of counter-gift (including its grateful reception) brings the recipient out further into the (infinite, arriving) horizon of the gift—just as this same person’s mediation of gift/givability *in the other direction* did (though in a different way).

If to mediate the givability of the gift in the “outward” direction (i.e. as giver, in the nominative case) is to be taken up, in a surprising and renewing way, into the rhythm and event of the gift itself—if it is the gift itself that prompts and empowers its own giving, where this giving must take the form of a *particular giver’s* giving, to be sure—then why would mediating the givability of the gift in the “inward” direction (i.e. as recipient, in the accusative/genitive case) not *also* represent the same arrival of self-as-participant-in-gift? More precisely, if mediating the gift—allowing its givability to take its course in and through oneself—is what allows the *giver’s* comportment to the gift to be “faithful” to the gift in its infinitude (since this mediation already *is* such fidelity), then why is it not also true that *reception* of the gift is also mediating and “faithful”? To deny this as a possibility—to equate the reception of pleasure, delight, recognition and/or benefit with the selfish work of the ego in every case—is to fail to see the substantive difference between (to put in crudely) masturbation and truly relational enjoyment.¹⁵⁷ (According to Milbank’s critique, the “ethics of self-sacrifice” ends up, ironically, *confirming* the autonomous individual, since the

¹⁵⁶ Marion does use the notion of “paradox”, but means by this the saturated givenness of a phenomenon that exceeds all intentional horizons. See, e.g., *The Idol and Distance*, 139-40, *Being Given*, 217, 287, and also *The Erotic Phenomenon*, 151-52, 216-17.

¹⁵⁷ “Enjoyment is *not* locked within the auto-affecting of the cogito, but is rather thoroughly contagious in its very nature.” Milbank, “The Shares of Being”, 56.

experience of *eros* and joy are important ways in which we are in fact taken beyond ourselves, and renewed in the event of gift.)

To be sure, the problem at hand is not the reception of gift *per se* (since of course, Marion's phenomenology is a sustained attempt to make way for a stance of pure receptivity to the givenness of phenomena), but the reception of a *counter-gift*. So the pertinent question is in fact: if gift is allowed to be properly mediated, in abeyance to the givability of the gift, by *first*, a giver, and *second*, a recipient, why not also *third*, a counter-giver (and this may well even be the completion of the second moment in the same person), and *fourth*, a counter-recipient, and so on indefinitely? Why truncate this series of mediations, especially if gift is infinite in its "inappropriability"? Is it not more appropriate to think pure "givability" as an excessive virtuality able to be mediated in *any number* of ways (not all at once, since the possibility of each particular mediation is a function of its circumstance in time, according to the non-identical repetition of gift, or the event of gift opening up time always differently)?

On Marion's picture, the gift does not eventuate apart from the giver's personal *mediation* of the givable. Though the gift itself is "formally" or dynamically primary, the concrete giver is its "materially" necessary mediator—an *expressive locus* or *hypostasis*, if you like (putting aside for now the question of the matter of the concrete gift *itself*). But why not allow that recipients, counter-givers and counter-recipients can *all* be expressive *loci* of a circulating, non-identically repeating gift? In that case the excessiveness of gift would be its unpredictable capacity for inspiring diverse instances and modes of its expression through time.

2.10. Conclusion

Milbank's "paradoxical" perspective on gift-exchange involves overcoming a certain (anti-Hegelian) allergy to anything suggesting "self-return". A crucial difference is pointed out

between the “gain” reinforcing a subject turned upon itself (in “identical repetition”) and the reception of a good which turns the subject out relationally, in joy and gratitude (“non-identical repetition”). A way is thus opened for thinking gift-exchange in terms of a fundamentally *social* or *dialogical* self, one belonging with others *in the world* and *in the flesh*. With Robert Spaemann (and supplementing this above, von Hildebrand), the paradox of ex-appropriation and the sharing of the Good are invoked, in place of the “ethics of self-sacrifice”. “Universal gift” and “Peace” are also called upon, so as to overcome certain limitations of *Maussian* gift-exchange (i.e. parochial society). As for the “dialectical negation” of world, flesh, presence, and visible form for the sake of ascent to a supposedly “pure” love or gift, this is eschewed also. In its place there is added a Balthasarian “aesthetic” paradox (the presence of withdrawal, the withdrawal of presence, the suggestion of the infinite in sensible form) which is linked with de Lubac’s “integralist” paradox (nature as always-already infused with and lured by grace, the “suspension of the material” in the divine¹⁵⁸).

This dialogical paradigm seems promising as a way of understanding gift-exchange and defending it from unilateralist critique. To be sure, it is less clear (than Milbank would assume) whether and how this paradigm might accommodate anonymous charity (the claim that Marion’s “interlocuted subject” is immune to renewal by gift was also found to be questionable). In the following two chapters, a dialogical reading of gift-giving will be developed further, by way of an inquiry into the nature of synergetic or co-operative activity. It will be claimed that the condition for synergy, and for gift-exchange in particular, is the plural mediation of the communicable—an active principle that circulates and is able to be possessed and expressed by many.

¹⁵⁸ See the editors’ introduction to *RONT*.

3. Gift and Shared Agency

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter an attempt is made to account for the emergence of unity between participants in gift-exchange, in terms of shared agency. The latter is read as the sharing of some communicable entity—“Gift”—which remains itself while passing between its participants. *First*, the basic idea given in this first stage of the overall argument of the thesis, is shown to be already approximated in the history of philosophical thought. A selective reading is given of (i) the dynamics of play according to the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, (ii) the complexities of mutual recognition in the thought of Hegel, (iii) the account of relational subjectivity offered by the contemporary French philosopher of dialogue, Francis Jacques, and (iv) the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy’s account of sharing, in the “singular-plural”, of the mystery of belonging-together-in-Being (Hegel and Jacques receive more extensive attention).

This leads into *second*, a more or less original argument in favour of a strong reading of the “Sameness”¹ of what is co-operatively expressed through time in the event of gift-exchange. It is argued that the emergence of a *society* of participants in gift-exchange, is best understood in terms of some communicable entity (“Gift”) which remains itself—not as an individual in any straight-forward sense, but as a plurally mediated wellspring of virtuality—while passing back and forth between those involved in this exchange. These participants are borne toward each other ecstatically and expressly (if not “self-sacrificially”) in generosity and gratitude, by virtue of the excess of Gift which each bears (carries and brings forth). The result is an original reading of the recognition and circulation of gift, one which supplements Milbank’s

¹ This is inspired by, but is probably only close to, Martin Heidegger’s use of “the Same” (*das Selbe*) in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). See note 32 below.

argument in favour of reciprocity against the French critique. Important objections, and possible strengths and limitations of this ontology, are addressed in the next chapter.

3.2. Shared Agency in “Continental” Thought

The previous chapter moved toward a dialogical reading of the capacity to give, drawing on the ontology of reciprocity favoured by John Milbank and Catherine Keller. It was argued that the crucial difference between a dialogical reading of gift, and Jean-Luc Marion’s unilateral reading, is that the call and renewal of the gifted-and-giving “subject” is horizontally mediated according to the former reading, but not according to the latter. Where Marion, after Derrida, fears that any form of gift-exchange would collapse the gift back into the fixed horizon of the autonomous and self-serving individual, Milbank contends that the circulation of gift(s) can in fact renew the subject further, drawing the subject out ecstatically into the eventful horizon of gift.

Now this dialogical reading of gift, which for Milbank and Keller is the way to a properly *relational* account of the subject (and for Milbank is also the appropriate way to think of the *grace* of acting-well) lends itself to the following development. If the futural calling (the non-identical repetition) of the subject is horizontally inflected, such that, as Milbank proposes, the event of gift-exchange is the emergence of a certain (incipient) *society*, then perhaps it is best to imagine that each giver’s act of giving is a relatively distinct *moment* of a more encompassing Act, namely, gift-exchange. That is, perhaps gift-exchange is an Act which circulates between plural participants in Gift (capitals are used to signify an act and/or virtuality which is concretely shared, or in other words mediated and repeated through many).² Again, if the Act of gift-exchange is not precisely the act of any one particular giver,

² For one subject to perform, alone or with someone else, a certain act of type *x* and another subject to perform another act of type *x*, is *not* enough to make for concrete sharing on this account. If, for e.g., persons *A* and *B* are involved in a dialogue

then the primary “subject” of this Act is not an individual in any straight-forward sense. Thus the thought of reciprocity plausibly leads toward a thought of shared agency, where the Subject of this agency is not fixed but is somehow free to pass back and forth, assuming one position then another.³

3.2.1. *An Hegelian Clarification*⁴

So how might one go about thinking in terms of a Subject whose agency is not fixed but is somehow free to pass back and forth? It is best to begin with an important clarification. What is traced in this chapter is a movement from the notion of unmediated, individual agency to the idea of a circulating Subject or Agent. But this movement *does not leave the notion of individual agency behind completely*. For on this second notion of agency (Agency), Gift is *not* thought to occur simply on its own, in a more rarefied dimension, and without the mediation of individual persons. If Gift *were* thought in this way, the active role of individual participants in gift-exchange would be denied, leaving these participants enclosed in their unmediated individual agency, as well as implying, problematically, that Gift is simply an unmediated individual writ large. On this account, rather, the Gift is thought to enact itself *as this* person’s giving (and receiving), then *as this other* person’s giving (and receiving), and so on. While the localised agency that makes for a person’s very own participation in gift-exchange is not simply reducible to his/her own *individual*⁵ agency—since this localised

together, and persons *C* and *D* are also involved in their *own* dialogue somewhere else, then *A* and *C* “share” in dialogue in a loose, *non-concrete* sense only.

³ For Milbank the event of society is the generation of a certain “microculture”. “Can [‘erotic saturation’] not rather consist in a shared *habitus*, a shared microculture, which through its love and transformation of things, including the bodies of the lovers, conceives the exchange love of the lovers not simply as an accidental mutual self-abandonment, but also as a local cultivation of a world conceived as itself springing from and declaring love, since it shows itself to be beautiful and therefore obscurely suggestive of meaning?” John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love” in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 253-317, here 265

⁴ The method followed below, of transcending (“sublating”) the individual in favour of a *mediated* universal, is the approach of Hegel; the influence of Hegel is ubiquitous in this chapter. See G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977).

⁵ Where “individual” is not modified by the “communicable”; “individual” in the “thinner” sense that precedes the thought of the individual’s mediation and repetition of communicable Gift. According to this latter thought, there *is* no individual

agency is no less the agency of a circulating “Subject”, Gift—it is also true that Gift does not occur except in and through and *as* the acts of individual participants (who, to return to the first half of this equation, are therefore “individuals” in a “thick” sense which already includes the bearing of Gift).

3.2.2. Gift-exchange and Spiel

What calls for thought, then, is the possibility of a plurally mediated and therefore “nomadic”⁶ agency. Gadamer comes close to describing such a dynamic in his analysis of play (*Spiel*), though he does not link play with gift explicitly:

The movement of playing ... renews itself in constant repetition. The movement backward and forward is obviously so central to the definition of play that it makes no difference who or what performs this movement. The movement of play has, as it were, no substrate ... As far as language is concerned, the actual subject of play is obviously not the subjectivity of an individual who, among other activities, also plays but is instead the play itself ... Play clearly represents an order in which the to-and-fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself.⁷

In this passage Gadamer suggests that “play itself” is the primary agent or subject of play, rather than any particular participant or player. More precisely, the play in question is said to have *no subject at all*. Gadamer transcends the acting individual phenomenologically in order to make way for the phenomenon of “the play itself” (“the actual subject of play is obviously not the subjectivity of an individual who, among other activities, also plays but is instead the

agency that is not already the agency of the communicable; it is thus inappropriate to deny the reducibility of the individual’s agency to individual agency in this “thicker” sense.

⁶ No reference to Gilles Deleuze is intended here.

⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd edn, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Continuum: London and New York, 2004), 103-4. More generally see “Play as the clue to ontological explanation” in the same volume, 101-134, and “The Play of Art” in his *The Relevance of the Beautiful and Other Essays*, trans. Nicholas Walker, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 123-30. There are some interesting parallels to be found in the performance theory and anthropology of ritual of Richard Schechner. See “Actuals” in Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 26-65. Compare also the reflections by Romano Guardini in “The Playfulness of the Liturgy”, *Communio: International Catholic Review*, 21 (1994), 105-114.

play itself”). Thus he takes *event* to be primary, and movement to be ungrounded (“the movement of play has, as it were, no substrate”), in keeping with Heidegger’s way of thinking the subject-less *Es gibt* of Be-ing.⁸ Here Gadamer understands “subject”, “substrate” and “agent” to refer to the *individual* (that which is said to *participate* in the one play). This is shown by the fact that his transcending/sublating the individual in favour of an encompassing and spontaneous dynamic, results in the notion of a fundamentally subject-less event, though this is not intended to exclude the participation of individuals *in* this event.

A subtly different approach is possible, however. One might free “subject”, “substrate” and “agent” from this strict association with the individual, and consider the possibility of a circulating or “nomadic” Agent. On this view, as applied to gift-exchange, to give a gift is to participate in a certain play of Life—a *virtus*⁹ and excess which passes back and forth, empowering one then the other, prompting each one to let Life enact itself as gift through oneself on the way to the other. Thus each giver, by giving, takes her turn in the act of recognising the interdependence of our involvement in the Good.

Developing this picture further: this mutuality, this belonging-together, is what is posited (expressed and realised) in and through the exchange of gifts. The reciprocal form of gift-giving is thus the formal content proposed in each gift. Each gift is rather like a question which is complete only as a gesture that entrusts its completion to another. Or, each gift adds to a dialogue which calls for—and which is—infinite supplementation.¹⁰ Again, each gift proposes and signifies an unending life of supplementation. Like a musical note, the single

⁸ See Lecture VII in Part II of Martin Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?*, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), esp. 187-89; Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper Collins, 1962), §§43-44.

⁹ For Milbank’s understanding of *virtus* see his *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd edn, 430 ff. (*actus* and *virtus* in God) and 327-80 (*virtus* and virtue).

¹⁰ “There can be no finality in time, and ‘oppressors’ are precisely people who seek to isolate a secure ‘here and now,’ to ‘hold’ time as a spatial possession ... When time is allowed to pass, it is valued, and its revelation of non-self-identity and non-identical repetition is seen to image, more precisely than a secure spatial present, the non-circumscribability of the infinite.” Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009), 172-73.

gift *lingers*—it comes forward just insofar as it negates itself in favour of the (open, unpredictable, yet appropriately developing) series.¹¹ Likewise, the act of giving—that recognition of the other which in the same stroke recognises the interdependence of our involvement in the Good, and thus the inseparability of our mirroring acts of recognition—this is a certain negation of a (non-existent, impossible) *mono*-agency, in favour of a relational, *co*-operative, *synergetic* self.

3.2.3. *Gift-Exchange and Anerkennung*

One cannot deny the Hegelian legacy here—though the question of the *precise* relation between a dialogical ontology such as this (*Life* passing back and forth between those involved in *mutual recognition*), and the Hegelian notion of *Geist* in all its modalities, is highly involved. It is worth exploring Hegel’s notion of mutual recognition (*Anerkennung*), for the latter may well be more conducive to an ontology of peace (interpersonal harmony and synergy) than Milbank realises.¹² Hegel writes in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*:

A self-consciousness exists *for a self-consciousness*. Only so is it in fact self-consciousness; for only in this way does the unity of itself in its otherness become explicit for it ... With this, we already have before us the Notion [*Begriff*] of Spirit [*Geist*] ... this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: ‘I’ that is ‘We’ and ‘We’ that is ‘I’. Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.¹³

¹¹ For the notion of lingering (*Verweilen*), a notion which Heidegger takes from the pre-Socratics, see John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), §6, esp. 188-9.

¹² Milbank objects to the agonistic side of Hegelian dialectic in “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek” in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233.

¹³ The passage continues, “Thus the action has a double significance not only because it is directed against itself as well as against the other, but also because it is indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other ... Each is for the other the middle term, through which each mediates itself with itself and unites with itself; and each is for itself, and for the other, an immediate being on its own account, which at the same time is such only through this mediation. They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1977), 110-111. All quotes from the *Phenomenology* follow the translator’s use of italics. “Notion” is a

Thus for Hegel, each person comes to him/herself as a person *along with the other*, *synergetically*:

[T]his action of the one has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well ... Each sees the *other* do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.¹⁴

The *synergetic* nature of personhood (understood here as freedom) means for Hegel that recognition is nothing other than the recognition of the mutuality of recognition. Recognition is therefore the (co-operative) negation of the illusion of a strictly separate identity and agency, the *Aufhebung* of both individualities in favour of the complex truth of interdependence:

Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself* [and] must proceed to supersede [*aufheben*] the *other* independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being ... [I]n so doing it proceeds to supersede [*aufheben*] its *own* self, for this other is itself. This ambiguous supersession [*Aufhebung*] of its ambiguous otherness is equally an ambiguous return *into itself*. For first, through the supersession, it receives back its own self, because, by superseding *its* otherness, it again becomes equal to itself; but secondly, the other self-consciousness equally gives it back again to itself, for it saw itself in the other, but supersedes this being of itself in the other and thus lets the other again go free ...¹⁵

In response to worries that the “negation” of the other could only be an unethical failure to see the other as a person in her own right, it can be pointed out that for Hegel the recognising self does not negate the other in just any respect, but only the other taken as *purely and simply an individual ego* (i.e. as non-interdependent). Since this is not simply negation, but

clumsy translation of *Begriff*, which refers more to the mental *act* of grasping. See Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 58-61.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111-112

¹⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111.

also the negation *of* negation—from both sides, the one whom one is *not*, is taken to be *essential* to one’s mediated personhood—there is achieved a dialectical interpenetration of separateness *and* non-separateness. There is thus a double “ambiguity”: supersession (*Aufhebung*) and return-into-self are two aspects of the same movement, but this movement is doubled (and united in its doubleness) by occurring at both poles of mutual recognition at once. Along with the quote above (“Thus the action has a double significance not only because it is directed against itself as well as against the other, but also because it is indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other”), there is the following:

The Notion [*Begriff*] of this its unity in its duplication embraces many and varied meanings. Its moments, then, must on the one hand be held strictly apart, and on the other hand must in this differentiation at the same time also be taken and known as not distinct, or in their opposite significance.¹⁶

For Hegel, one’s person’s “negation” of the other does not and cannot occur unilaterally, or without the co-operation of the other, for to negate the other’s *total* independence (and with this, one’s own), is to perform the truth of *co-operative* negation. Not only is the negation of each person doubled in itself (person *A* negates himself just insofar as he is also negated by person *B*), but the doubleness of negation at one pole is doubled with double negation at the other pole (person *A* is negated by *A* and *B* together, only *with* the negation of *B* by *A* and *B* together). The “with” that conditions negation ensures that from each side, negation “lets the other go free” in an act of “release” (*Freigabe*)¹⁷—where this freedom, to be sure, is found

¹⁶ Thus “The twofold significance of the distinct moments has in the nature of self-consciousness to be infinite, or directly the opposite of the determinateness [differentiation] in which it is posited.” Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111. According to Michael Inwood, “Hegel endorses Spinoza’s claim that ‘determination is negation’ (Spinoza, Letter 50), that is, that a thing or concept is determinate only in virtue of a contrast with other things or concepts ...” Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, 78.

¹⁷ “Hegel’s claim is that freedom becomes actual through the process of recognition and emerges as liberation in the final moment of mutual-reciprocal releasement. In an important essay, Ludwig Siep identifies four main features of Hegel’s early concept of freedom: autonomy (*Autonomie*), union (*Vereinigung*), self-overcoming (*Selbstüberwindung*), and release (*Freigabe*).” Robert R. Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 80. See also p. 21. Williams cites Ludwig Siep, *Praktische Philosophie im Deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), 159-71.

relationally rather than atomically (the moment of separateness is thought in unity with the moment of union)—whereas Desire (*Begierde*) alone, with its orally unilateral agency (one that turns out to be unsustainable after all, and so not truly free) reduces the other to a mere object.¹⁸ To seek recognition and identity through the death or enslavement of the other also proves futile, insofar as these modes of performance exclude the condition of freedom's possibility (ie, mutuality with the other).¹⁹

In important respects, this vision of an inter-mediated and therefore relational self, is similar to that of Milbank:

[S]elf-love is valid as our self-reception of that portion of the cosmos that we ourselves are and so are closest to—even if, as St. Augustine clearly affirms, *we should only love ourselves to the degree that we persist in our true selves, as loving God and our neighbours*. In Augustine at least, there is none of that 'metaphysical' priority of self-love that Marion denounces, just because *the true self loves itself only as the self that loves God and others*, which always remains possible because of the inherent goodness and beauty of being as such.²⁰

Yet Milbank makes the mistake of associating the priority of self-love with Hegel's philosophy, when he asks whether "Marion is rather attacking a modern, for example Hegelian, priority of self-love."²¹ Putting this aside, however, Milbank makes at least one

¹⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 109-110.

¹⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 111-119. Besides Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hegel's Dialectic of Self-consciousness" in *Hegel's Dialectic: Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), 54-74; Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy: Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 183-238; Paul Ricoeur, "Mutual Recognition" in *The Course of Recognition*, trans. David Pellauer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 150-246; Paul Redding, "Fichte's Role in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Chapter 4". The latter article is accessible at http://www.personal.arts.usyd.edu.au/pauredi/Redding_Hegel-Fichte.pdf (this also covers the 20th century appropriation and distortion of *Anerkennung*). On the logic of double negation, see Dieter Henrich, "The Logic of Negation and Its Application" in *Between Kant and Hegel: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. David S. Pacini, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 316-331, and of course Hegel's Preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The running commentary of Yovel is illuminating: G.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Yirmiyahu Yovel (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror", here 265-66. My emphasis. Compare Milbank, "Sacred Triads: Augustine and the Indo-European Soul", *Modern Theology* (1997), 451-74.

²¹ Milbank, "The Gift and the Mirror", 266.

comment in *BR* that shows his aversion to what he would take to be the empty formalism of this Hegelian schema:

Both [Kantian and Lévinasian ethics] exhibit a similar obliteration of the living self in the form of the circular pointlessness of a subjectivity constituted through its respect for the (free or suffering) subjectivity of the other which is only subjective in returning that respect.²²

For Milbank, freedom is not a structurally neutral capacity to choose between different options, and even between good and evil. Rather, freedom is constituted as an orientation to the intrinsically good. Milbank thus objects to

the lack, in Kant ... of any teleology which can discriminate the good substance of what is willed from a deficient instance of such substance. Here, instead, the only thing willed is the law of free-willing itself, which defines legality as untrammelled autonomy... [Hence] political totalitarianism and terror really could, with a certain plausibility, pose as the fulfilling of the categorical imperative.²³

Hence freedom does not exist for its own sake, in its bare formality.²⁴ It follows that recognition of the other, for Milbank, is inseparable from a vision of the other as participating in, and oriented to, the Good.²⁵ This is not possible on a Kantian picture in which the phenomenal and noumenal are separated:

²² Milbank, *BR*, 144.

²³ “[O]ne can claim that if the Nazis still affirmed a Kantian free will as their good, then they also inherited the *aporias* of the free will, as half-admitted by Kant in *Religion Within the Bounds of Mere Reason*. For these *aporias*, there is no clear way of distinguishing between the will which genuinely wills freedom, and the will which wills against itself, restraining freedom: this self-opposition for Kant characterizes the evil will. As we shall see, these *aporias* arise because of the lack, in Kant, at this highest level, of any teleology which can discriminate the good substance of what is willed from a deficient instance of such substance. Here, instead, the only thing willed is the law of free-willing itself, which defines legality as untrammelled autonomy... [Hence] political totalitarianism and terror really could, with a certain plausibility, pose as the fulfilling of the categorical imperative.” Milbank, *BR*, 4.

²⁴ Hegel, however, believed he took the best from both ancient and modern philosophy with his notion of *Anerkennung*, thus giving genuine freedom true substance. “... Hegel’s view is that neither position is adequate by itself. The ancients suppress subjective freedom; the moderns attempt to ground ethics and politics in individual subjective freedom. Hegel believes the point of view of modernity is inadequate because of its formalism and individualism, on the one hand, and because of the absence of normative content, on the other.” Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, 18. See also Gadamer’s brilliant essay on the interaction between ancient and modern philosophy in the formation of Hegelian dialectic: Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Hegel and the Dialectic of the Ancient Philosophers” in his *Hegel’s Dialectic*, 5-34.

²⁵ Compare this Augustinian vision with David C. Schindler, “Freedom Beyond Our Choosing: Augustine on the Will and Its Objects”, *Communio* 29 (2002), 618-653.

[B]oth as formal and as ineffable, the Kantian ‘right’ which orientates the Good entirely exceeds all envisaging. In no sense could radical evil for him connote the loss of vision of the infinite, since the bounds between the finite and the infinite are permanently fixed and permit of no participatory mediation.²⁶

One might also question whether those involved in Hegel’s *Anerkennung* have enough wonder and festivity in their respectable social unity for Milbank’s narrative of gift-exchange. To be sure, *Anerkennung* is an operative concept across many *topoi* in Hegel’s work,²⁷ including love in the family. Love and dialectic are closely related for Hegel,²⁸ but it is natural to suspect the German philosopher of leaving behind the Christian supremacy of love²⁹ in favour of a Science and a State whose full realisation is not the actuality of love precisely (though it may presuppose love). Is love, for Hegel, too immediate, too caught up with feeling, and too particular to coincide with the attainment of the absolute standpoint, and

²⁶ BR, 12.

²⁷ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*.

²⁸ See Yovel’s comments in Hegel, *Hegel’s Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Yirmiyahu Yovel, 100. In Hegel’s earlier writings “love” and “life” are a prominent precursor to “spirit”. See Hegel, “The Spirit of Christianity and its Fate” and “Love” in *On Christianity: Early Theological Writings*, trans. T.M. Knox (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1970), 182-308. Harris’ commentary is useful: H.S. Harris, “Phantasie und Herz” in *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight 1770-1801* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 258-408. Dieter Henrich shows the influence of Hölderlin on Hegel on this regard: “The Allure of Mysticism” in *Between Kant and Hegel*, 65-81; also “The Way to the Fifth Philosophy (*The Science of Logic*)” in the same volume, 299-315 (esp. 314). A recent explanation of the formative stages of Hegel’s ideas on dialectic is found in Klaus Düsing, “Ontology and Dialectic in Hegel’s Thought”, trans. Andrés Colapinto, in Nectarios G. Limnatis (ed.), *The Dimensions of Hegel’s Dialectic* (New York and London: Continuum, 2010), 97-122. Jean-Luc Nancy finds dialectic to be *not erotic enough* and therefore not self-transcending. See his “Shattered Love” in *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simon Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 82-109. By contrast, William Desmond holds that dialectic is self-centred *inasmuch* as it is erotic, and that it should be surpassed in favour of a “metaxological” thought of the “between”. See, for e.g., William Desmond, *Desire, Dialectic, and Otherness: An Essay on Origins* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987) and *Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). Hodgson’s response to Desmond’s Kierkegaardian objections to Hegel may well apply to Milbank’s reading of Hegel: Peter Hodgson, *Hegel and Christian Theology: A Reading of the Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 247-58.

²⁹ 1 John 4; John 3:16. See Pope Benedict XVI, *God Is Love: Deus Caritas Est* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana; San Francisco: Ignatius Press, c2006).

the embrace of all citizens in the State?³⁰ It appears so, but an argument cannot be made to this effect here.³¹

Nevertheless, the notion of synergy or mutual act, as performed by persons who belong together insofar as their acts only make sense together, as well as the related idea that the Same³² overreaches the many, empowering the “momentary” acts of distinct participants—all this is promising material for a participatory ontology of gift-exchange.³³ Above all, the distinction implied in Hegel’s analysis, between a *conservative* “self-return” that would serve a *non-relational* self,³⁴ and a *transformative* self-return in which the self posits (and is posited

³⁰ See Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, paragraphs 158-168 (on love, pp. 110-14) and 181 (the transition from familial love to civil society, p. 122) and addition 7, p. 228 (on feeling and recognition); H.S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Night Thoughts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 481-88 and 523-544. Also Paul Ricoeur, “Mutual Recognition”. In that chapter Ricoeur draws on the three stages of recognition proposed by Alex Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, trans. Joel Anderson (London: Polity, 1995). See also Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, *Hegel and the Logical Structure of Love : An Essay on Sexualities, Family and the Law* (Aldershot: Ashgate, c1999).

³¹ The best recent article on this topic is A.R. Bjerke, “Hegel and the Love of the Concept”, *Heythrop* 52 (2011), 76-89. Bjerke argues that love is in fact *never* surpassed by thought in Hegel’s work.

³² I am using “Same” to indicate a principle (an active universal?) which spans, incorporates and releases difference, and so has more than a merely logical unity and intentional existence (*esse intentionale*, cf. Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, 11, art. 6). This sense should not be aligned with *idem* (the static permanence of an object), nor with *ipse* (the historical unity of a person); cf. Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, tr. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 116. My use of “Same” is also starkly different to the polemical use made by Lévinas in *Totality and Infinity*. If anything, it is (partially?) Hegelian, and possibly also reflects Martin Heidegger’s use of “the Same” (*das Selbe*) in *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1969). Sameness for Heidegger is “the belonging together of what is distinct” or “the gathering by means of difference”. See Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1954), 193, here cited and translated in David A. White, “Heidegger on Sameness and Difference”, *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 11 (1980), 107-25, notes 17-18. To be sure, not every reader of Heidegger will find in “the belonging together of what is distinct” an implicit reference to an “active universal” or self-same principle (something like a field or “spirit”) which is expressed in and between different elements, which are thereby gathered together—particularly given the “metaphysical” associations of such a notion. Jeff Malpas, for instance, would probably find in this an illegitimate appeal to some metaphysical principle working “behind the scenes”, whereas his method, retrieved from Heidegger, is to describe things in terms of their surface topology. See his *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, c2006). By contrast, the basic claim or move made in this chapter is twofold: (i) the belonging together of the many is to be questioned and not taken for granted, and (ii) it is therefore to be explained in terms of the “virtuality of the communicable”; the latter, I would argue, does *not* work problematically “behind the scenes” since its expression is *mediated*. I would even argue (elsewhere) that this is implied by Heidegger’s reflections on belonging-together; I take him as saying that different beings belong together insofar as they each abide in the *same primordial and indeterminate element, Being*, which precedes all ontic difference/judgement (*Ur-theil*) (hence I understand “Being” in the light of Friedrich Hölderlin’s “Über Urtheil und Seyn,” in H.S. Harris, *Hegel’s Development: Toward the Sunlight*, 515–16. Translated from the German by Harris). While Heideggerians will agree with (i) in their mediations on *Ereignis*, the event of gathering, the piety of their thinking typically refuses to look for (ii) a satisfactory “explanation” or more ultimate description of this event; such a move would supposedly be against the spirit of (i).

³³ A distinction is made between gift and contract in G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), paragraphs 76 and 80 (pp. 59, 62-3).

³⁴ Or more precisely, a “self” lacking genuine transcendence toward the other, for the objectification of the other in selfish Desire might still be called a “relation”. See Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, section I, for his ideas of enjoyment and living from something. In this context it seems unnecessary to speak with Lévinas of a “relation without relation”; one need only include transcendence toward the other, encounter with a distinct person, in one’s understanding of genuine relationality. Hence to merely “live from” another as if he/she were merely present-at-hand, like food to be enjoyed, is not to *relate* genuinely at all (and inversely, neither is “ecstatic absorption” in the Other.)

in) its *relationality*,³⁵ is crucial. If one assumes that the only mode in which something might arrive at and benefit the subject is by a reinforcement of the latter's egoism, then of course one must think transcendence toward the other in terms of self-sacrifice, and gift in terms of non-mutuality. But this assumption, which in many cases is probably fed by a reaction against Hegel,³⁶ and in consequence takes it as given that the self is basically curved upon itself, is unnecessary as well as unhelpful.³⁷

3.2.4. *Gift-exchange and Le Dialogue*

Milbank's critique of "mono-agency" and unilateralism can be supplemented further by drawing upon the ideas of a contemporary French philosopher of dialogue, Francis Jacques.

³⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer is right to exact precision in the use of "relationality", a word which can cover "a multitude of sins". "The term *relation* is by itself not very illuminating, for there are many kinds of relations ... Kenotic-perichoretic theism focuses on *loving* relations that are *mutual*, *reciprocal*, and *inclusive*. Yet these latter qualifiers are hardly adequate, for hatred can be mutual, reciprocal and mutual as well." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 144-5. Vanhoozer's emphasis. In this chapter, particularly in §3.3., an attempt is made to describe the relationality involved in gift-exchange in more precise terms.

³⁶ A reaction which does not exclude the French embrace of Jean Wahl's particular *appropriation* of Hegel at all. Bruce Baugh, in an important study of the French reception of Hegel [Bruce Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003)] lists Derrida as one of those postmodern theorists influenced by the "anti-thetical" tone of Wahl's reading of Hegel. He cites Jean Wahl, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: Rieder, 1929). Baugh notes also the influence of Jean Hyppolite and Alexandre Kojève on 20th Century French philosophy, but gives Wahl primary place, thus dispelling the myth that Kojève first introduced France to Hegel with his famous lecture series (Baugh, *French Hegel*, 1-2). Cf. Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), partially translated by James Nichols as *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969). "In Hegel's figure of the unhappy consciousness, Wahl found a penetrating analytic of an internally divided and self-alienated subject, a subject that strives vainly for synthesis but instead oscillates between self and not-self, being and nothingness [Wahl, *Le malheur*, 169, 188] ... Other [French theorists of the 1920s and 30s, not the Marxists] refuse the moment of synthesis altogether, seeing the divisions that render consciousness unhappy as inescapable, and the synthesis that would heal these divisions as worse than the 'unhappiness' it was meant to 'cure' ... [A]nti-thetics [is] the play of opposed terms that negate and pass into each other without ever coinciding in a meaningful whole. Dialectics [by contrast] require the mediation of a third term that comprises both thesis and anti-thesis, and without this encompassing moment of synthesis, differences are left unresolved and unreconciled, embroiled in a conflict without end or meaning." Baugh, *French Hegel*, 5-6. Says Milbank: '[A] piety of the tragic' ... simply will not do, partly because it *still*, after all, *evades* the tragic, by hypostasizing it in speculative fashion ... Christianity refuses, having recognized a universal tragic condition, to ontologize this, but makes the extraordinary move of seeing the universal itself as but a contingent narrative upshot ... [O]ne needs the myth of the Fall in order to think a genuine Good, which to be non-reactive can only be an original plenitude." *BR*, 149, Milbank's emphasis.

³⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg makes positive use of Hegelian dialectic in his Trinitarian ontology of love. For a summary and critique see Anselm K. Min, "The Dialectic of Pannenberg's Hegelian Trinitarianism", *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 6/3, (2004) 252-269, and more recently, Timothy Harvie, "God as a Field of Force: Personhood and Science in Wolfhart Pannenberg's Pneumatology", *The Heythrop Journal* 52 (2011), 250-59. Claude Bruaire appropriates the Hegelian notion of spirit in order to work out a full ontology of gift. The only volume in English on Bruaire is fortunately very good. See Antonio López, *Spirit's Gift: The Metaphysical Insight of Claude Bruaire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006). John Milbank makes reference to Bruaire in his "The Gift and the Mirror", citing Claude Bruaire, *L'être et l'esprit* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1983). For some potentially problematic aspects of *Geist*, though, including its association with *thumos*, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

In his *Difference and Subjectivity: Dialogue and Personal Identity*, Jacques carefully explores the dynamics of shared activity in the context of dialogue particularly, but also in relation to love. He defines “dialogism” as “the distribution of the message between two uttering agencies in present relation with each other” and hopes in this way to contribute to “the foundation of a pragmatics-based theory of language.”³⁸ One might in fact call this a *synergetic* pragmatics, since here “what the speaking subject is saying depends on the interlocutionary context of communication,”³⁹ and since the “subject” of the act of saying, of producing meaning, is “we”—first person *plural*:

[W]hereas the pronoun *I* might well refer to the person who *speaks*, it no longer belongs to the one who *says*. It is doubtless I—the speaker—who speaks. But I am not, correctly speaking, the utterer: it is *we* who say ... [Thus in every case] the listener’s presence is productive [and] [t]he nonautonomy of discourse is a condition of communication.⁴⁰

In the astute words of Nancy, our saying is neither sheerly plural not sheerly singular (for these would in different ways represent monologue, mono-operation) but *singular-plural*.⁴¹ Once one appreciates the *synergy* which makes for dialogue, the “other” is no longer seen as the mute target of a unilateral act of speech: “[T]here is bilateral participation by the agents in a single mediation process. The other is not the target of communication: he or she is, like

³⁸ Francis Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity: Dialogue and Personal Identity*, trans. Andrew Rothwell (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991), xiii.

³⁹ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, xii.

⁴⁰ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 9.

⁴¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000). “There is no meaning if meaning is not shared ... because *meaning is itself the sharing of Being*” (2). “Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence” (3). “*Let us say we for all being, that is for every being, for all beings one by one, each time in the singular of their essential plural*” (3). “[I]t is necessary to refigure fundamental ontology (as well as the existential analytic, the history of Being, and the thinking of *Ereignis* that goes along with it) with a thorough resolve that *starts from the plural singular of origins*, from being-with (26). “*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as co-essence. In turn, co-essence, or *being-with* (being-with-many), designates the essence of the *co-*, or even more so, the *co-* (the *cum*) itself in the position or guise of an essence. In fact, coessentiality cannot consist in an assemblage of essences ... Coessentiality signifies the essential sharing of essentiality ... if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the “with” that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition” (30). “[T]he singularity of each is indissociable from its being-with-many ... a singularity is indissociable from a plurality” (32). All emphases are Nancy’s. There are more references to Nancy below in §3.2.5.

me, a fundamental part of it.”⁴² Hence, as Gadamer saw, dialogue *plays* between its participants. Not only does the act of listening make possible the act of speaking, but each participant also takes his/her turn in speaking or listening, not just in fact, but according to the form of dialogue: “If I am not able to speak when my turn comes, and *with* you rather than *to* you, then the fact that I am being spoken to is already a form of intimidation, an enemy discourse.”⁴³ To participate in the play of dialogue, then, is to take up, and then hand over, for a time, the prerogative of speaking (or listening). If my speaking is dialogically open and thus meaningful, it must eventually give way, *in and as* this speaking, to another’s speaking (and the same must be said for listening)—this is what it is for *us* to *Say*. Expanding on this further: to speak is to appropriate *and expropriate* the role of speaker, not in the sense of (i) taking this role *first* as *exclusively one’s own*, and *then* as *exclusively someone else’s*, but in the sense of (ii) assuming, for a time, a position which is *also* destined for the other, a position which is assumed properly only by submitting to this *double*-belonging. In short, to speak is to share, intentionally and objectively, the Act of dialogue—the Act of sharing which, as shared, is already an “alliance”:

[T]he reciprocal relation that makes possible the attribution of *I* and *you*, and then the first stages of personal identification, appears in the form of a union and an alliance. As a result, it cannot be appropriated; to say that a mutual alliance is mine or yours is inevitably to usurp it. An alliance is *ours*.⁴⁴

On this picture, the dialogical subject, *qua* dialogical, has no act apart from its acts of sharing, where what it shares is the mediated Act/Play of dialogue. To act dialogically is to act *with*. But to elaborate, this is not to speak always *at precisely the same time* as one’s partner in dialogue—that would only undo the differentiation and directionality necessary for dialogue.

⁴² Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 12-13.

⁴³ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 87-88.

⁴⁴ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 33.

Partnership in dialogue is not the negation of immutably fixed roles (pure speaker against pure listener) *in favour of no role differentiation whatsoever*, but is rather the free mutation and playful reversal of differentiated roles (speaker-becoming-listener-as-listener-becomes-speaker). The extremes of a single radius are never confused even as the wheel spins. In grammatical terms, one person takes the nominative in regard to one verb (to speak) while the other is the direct object (she is addressed) and/or indirect object in regard to this verb (she is offered a word and a relation). Yet in regard to this verb (to speak) the nominative *leads into* the accusative and/or dative case; the speaker is destined to become listener and recipient, and (normatively) determines his speaking as such. Likewise, the accusative/dative leads into the nominative at the other pole.⁴⁵ But in addition to this *diachronic* reversal, there is a *synchronic* reversal of sorts, since the listener takes the nominative case in regard to another verb (to listen), such that the speaker is already a direct object (she is listened to) and indirect object (she is offered attention, and a relation). This dynamic is complicated further by the fact that to speak well one must “listen” for the (current and future) response of the other and shape one’s speech accordingly. Thus, inversely, to listen to someone speaking can already be, in a manner, to speak.⁴⁶ Jacques summarises this rather complex situation as follows:

⁴⁵ Phenomenologically, these mutations are not gradual fadings—as if the speaker spoke less and less and listened more and more toward the end of his time of speaking—but rather sudden reversals. But this is not to say that they are essentially violent, or always a matter of extraneous rupture, abortion or truncation. The time of a question asked, for example, leads naturally into the time in which an answer is listened for. The answer does not break into the saying of the question, as if this without this interruption the first speaker would have continued happily and indefinitely. This point is not invalidated by the fact that truncation and interruption often occur in dialogue. For if the alternation that makes for dialogue were simply a matter of one person’s voice overriding that of the other, and vice versa, there would only really be a *polemos* between two monologues competing for the same time and space, where neither accepts nor expresses the *shared* nature of the Act of dialogue.

⁴⁶ This sketch of the dynamics of dialogue has been simplified by ignoring the various ways that dialogue can break down, and also the diverse uses of language. J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, ed. J. O. Urmson (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962); Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, German text with English translation by G.E.M. Anscombe, P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte, revised 4th ed. by P.M.S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), esp. §§23-24 (pp. 14^e-16^e).

Chapter 3 – Gift and Shared Agency

Far from being able to speak only in his or her own present, the interlocuters are pragmatically obliged to adopt a common temporal framework, a multipersonal time scale that in a sense joins them together in the same speech act.⁴⁷

Hence, for this philosopher of dialogue, *relation* is primary, rather than the individual subject.⁴⁸

If we were not all afraid of the sublime, I would say that human persons, just like the divine ‘Persons’ [who manifest themselves separately but act jointly], are quite literally secondary aspects of a primary relation, a fundamental agency.⁴⁹

By attending to the dynamics of reciprocity, Jacques comes to a similar conclusion to Hegel—the dynamising “source” and “Subject” or “fundamental agency” of mutual activity is not an individual in the usual sense, but is distributed, mediated, and repeated. Speaking of love, Jacques writes that

[t]he amorous relation does not emanate from the *I*, but rather it flows toward it, as well as toward the other person, linking them together and transporting them; it quite literally grabs them both and elevates them into an awareness of their own personal existence.⁵⁰

He adds that love itself is the source of loving activity, and even of personal identity:

Love, like poetry, can neither be deliberately created nor forced. It always begins with itself and is, by its relational nature, the *causa sui*. By fostering our concern for others, it makes us exist.⁵¹

Once the relationality⁵² of love is properly understood—and this requires one to see love as *causa sui*, and therefore as actively expressed in the *singular-plural*—one appreciates that

⁴⁷ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 8.

⁴⁸ Not that relations are free-floating for Jacques: “I attempted to define the identity of persons on the basis of the communication relation, in contrast to the identity of individuals, which act as supports for the relation, rather than forming its poles”. Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 318-9.

⁴⁹ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 63-64.

⁵⁰ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 81.

⁵¹ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 86.

⁵² See “Primum Relationis” in Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 115-161.

love is not an isolated function of an individual moving himself outward, autonomously. Love itself makes the lover just as much as it makes the beloved, and since this love-relation, which is primary, is mediated by (at least) *two* poles, it is false to say that the lover is simply and purely the nominative subject, while the beloved is merely love's object:

We are misled by grammatical appearances into making the whole of the love-relation dependent on one of its poles, the first person in its loving intentionality. As for the other [on this false picture], it is simply the accusative of his or her love, his or her target; it is the direct object of the verb to love ...⁵³

Thus reciprocity, far from tainting the purity of love, is essential to the temporality of love. Jacques' response to the idea of a "pure" gift without return, would therefore be as follows: the idea of an individually generous agency, of a ready capacity-to-give which begins and continues in the subject's *inward* time rather than in the *shared* time of exchange, is an illusory one. This does not make the gift impossible and aporetic, however. For while reciprocity is the condition of gift, it is not also, and equally, the destructive anti-condition of gift as it is for Derrida.⁵⁴ Positioning himself at the intersection of gift, love and dialogue, Jacques writes:

[L]ove given and received is ... just like speech addressed by one person and received by another. Who gives and who receives? It is impossible to tell; so close is the reciprocal link here between giving and receiving ... Just as love cannot feed on images of the loved one, so speech that is addressed to the image of an interlocutor, without proceeding from an interlocutive relationship with him or her, remains null and void. If I am not able to speak

⁵³ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 77.

⁵⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). "If the figure of the circle is essential to economics, the gift must remain *aneconomic* ... It is perhaps in this sense that the gift is impossible. Not impossible but *the* impossible. The very figure of the impossible. It announces itself, gives itself to be thought as the impossible" (7). Derrida's emphasis. "These conditions of possibility of the gift (that some 'one' gives some 'thing' to some 'one other') designates simultaneously the conditions of the impossibility of the gift [and thus of] the annulment, the annihilation, the destruction of the gift" (12).

when my turn comes, and *with* you rather than *to* you, then the fact that I am being spoken to is already a form of intimidation, an enemy discourse.⁵⁵

It is not difficult to apply this logic to gift-exchange specifically. According to the reading of gift-exchange pursued in this chapter, just as (i) to speak is (normatively) to acknowledge (in practice and implicitly) that the full sense of the said, and the full actuality of saying, are realised only with another through time, so also (ii) to give a gift is (normatively) to acknowledge that the meaning of this gift, and of this act, must be entrusted forward and received anew. Thus to give is to share with another the creative production of oneself as a giver. Or more precisely, recalling the Hegelian ambiguities of recognition:⁵⁶ giving and receiving oneself are two moments of the same *co-operative* production of self in gift-exchange, a co-production which is tied intimately with the co-production *of the other* as giving recipient / receiving giver.

3.2.5. *Gift-exchange and Ereignis*

To end the first part of this chapter, it seems appropriate also to draw upon the insight of Jean-Luc Nancy. The latter attempts to re-think community in terms that are somewhat Heideggerian (yet without saying much about “gift” specifically).⁵⁷ Continuing the analysis above, one might say that the counter-gift lets happen the same *Ereignis*, or obediently takes

⁵⁵ Jacques, *Difference and Subjectivity*, 87-88. The prominent contemporary theologian of dialogue, Kevin Vanhoozer, also distinguishes between reciprocal speaking “with” and unilateral speaking “to”. “No one wants to depict the relationship between God and human persons solely in terms of what Jürgen Habermas calls ‘strategic’ action ... which aims at bringing about a desired change in the world by manipulating or controlling an entity’s behaviour. By way of contrast, the success of ‘communicative’ action depends on an agent’s bringing about understanding on the part of other interlocutors about some matter, reaching a consensus, and freely coordinating their ensuing actions.” Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology*, 316-17. He cites Jürgen Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, vol. I: *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon 1984). Vanhoozer, in the text cited here, in fact draws on several philosophers of dialogue, Habermas and Mikhail Bakhtin particularly. The reader is referred to that work, to that of Jacques and Habermas, and additionally, Oliver Davies, *A Theology of Compassion: Metaphysics of Difference and the Renewal of Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001). It is not necessary to summarise the history of philosophical dialogism here.

⁵⁶ See §3.2.3. above.

⁵⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural* and Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*. See also Jean-Luc Nancy, “*La Comparution / The Compearance: From the Existence of ‘Communism’ to the Community of ‘Existence’*”, trans. Tracy B. Strong, *Political Theory* 20/3 (1992), 371-398. Accessible at www.jstor.org/stable/192184. For a fairly recent introduction see B.C. Hutchens, *Jean-Luc Nancy and The Future of Philosophy* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).

its turn in mediating the same originary Event (happening, revelation) of our belonging-together-in-Being. The same truth is manifest, the same belonging is realised, first in the gift and then differently in the counter-gift, *where this difference is essential to the truth of belonging-together*. Thus the second manifestation does not cancel the validity of the first manifestation of gift. Nor does it simply repeat, identically and banally, some truth already fully present in the first manifestation, some actuality which calls for no supplementation/repetition. For “Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another, circulating in the *with* and as the *with* of this singularly plural coexistence.”⁵⁸ Thus

it is necessary to refigure fundamental ontology (as well as the existential analytic, the history of Being, and the thinking of *Ereignis* that goes along with it) with a thorough resolve that *starts from the plural singular of origins, from being-with*.⁵⁹

If the mystery of Being is nothing apart from the event of belonging-together, and if the gift and counter-gift are responses made to and in this mystery, and if these responses are revelatory of the mystery calling them forth, one after the other, one *through* the other, according to the incipient form of belonging—if the counter-gift takes over, for a while, the same task of mediating infinite belonging into presence, then rather than *annulling* what it “counters”, it in fact says and produces anew, the (differentiated) *Same*.⁶⁰ This seems to be a useful rendering of what Milbank means by asymmetrical reciprocity and the non-identical repetition of gift. This idea (the Same is reciprocally and non-identical repeated) in fact lends

⁵⁸ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 3. Nancy’s emphasis.

⁵⁹ Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 26. Nancy’s emphasis. “From one to the other is the syncopated repetition of origins-of-the-world, which are each time one or the other ...” (6). “This very humble lays of our everyday existence contains another rudimentary ontological attestation: what we receive (rather than what we perceive) with singularities is the discreet passage of *other origins of the world*. What occurs there, what bends, leans, twists, addresses, denies—from the newborn to the corpse—is neither primarily ‘someone close,’ nor an ‘other,’ nor a ‘stranger,’ nor ‘someone similar.’ It is an origin; it is an affirmation of the world, and we know that the world has no origin other than this singular multiplicity of origins” (8-9). Nancy’s emphasis. “Finite existence is necessarily shared. ‘Politics’ must designate what interests each point of existence in the ‘common.’ The stake is the interest (that which matters) of the *interesse* (at once: ‘to be between,’ ‘to be separate,’ ‘differ,’ ‘be between,’ ‘participate’).” Nancy, “*La Comparution*”, 390.

⁶⁰ See note 32 above. In this sentence, “Same” refers primarily to that which is actualized co-operatively (i.e. social unity), rather than to the nomadic *virtus* brought into expression by distinct participants in gift-exchange (as per the account given below of the possibility of social unity).

itself to the following Heideggerian development (§3.3.): *To participate in Gift, as giver and/or recipient, is to actively allow Gift to differ in and from oneself; it is to let happen the Event of differentiation (between participant and Gift, and thus between participants in Gift), which is no less an Event of gathering-together (in both these “dimensions” simultaneously).*

3.3. The Reciprocal Expression of Excess: A Proposal

One might accept the critique of unilateralism offered in the previous chapter while remaining sceptical about the speculative aspect of this chapter’s developments. How seriously are we to take these capitalised terms (“Gift”, “Subject”, “Same”)? Is it necessary to posit a real entity that is truly *one* even as it circulates and assumes different localities in which it is diversely enacted/expressed/manifest? Why not simply say the following: just as my humanity and your humanity are “the same” only in the sense that I have the same general nature and am a member of the same species (*homo sapiens*) as you—there is no already-real, essential “human” or “humanity” which circulates as the same virtuality or dynamic source between all human persons, constituting each as human—the “Gift” that I enact (say, by offering chocolates) and then you enact (by enjoying them gratefully, and later shouting me a drink) is one only in this “generic” or “specific” sense. Thus “Gift”, like “generosity”, is merely an instantiable *type*, a certain *way* of being and acting. So on this view, one should not take too seriously the use of the capital in “Gift”. For a type does not occur *ante res* (i.e., prior to its instantiation in particulars). That is, a type considered in itself, has neither real being nor real unity. Whatever real being it has is reducible to the (determinate) being proper to individuals, and whatever unity it has is merely the unity of a concept in the mind.⁶¹

⁶¹ There many ways in which one might adopt such a “non-realistic” stance on universals. See the various forms of nominalism described in D.M. Armstrong, *Universals and Scientific Realism, Volume I: Nominalism and Realism*

In response to this objection, one can shed favourable light on a stronger view of sameness as follows (the rest of this chapter). But first, this view must be brought into relief comparatively (“Preparation, Phase 1”), before further preparations are made below.

3.3.1. Preparation, Phase 1: Two Takes on Virtuality

The important feature of this reading of the sameness of Gift is what might be called *the virtuality of the communicable*.⁶² By this is meant not the tendency of something to become communicable, but rather the innate tension in a communicable entity. The latter is able to—and in fact essentially “strives” to—circulate as a self-same virtuality or dynamising principle, and thus come to varied expression in different mediating individuals (an explanation and development of “virtuality” is given in chapter 6). By contrast, on the weaker reading of the sameness of Gift one must in each case attribute virtuality simply to the individual in question; here the expressible virtuality of the gifted giver—the virtuality released into actuality in and as the giver’s giving—is not at the same time the virtuality of the communicable as that inhabits the mediating individual, as it is on the stronger reading.

The advantage of the stronger reading is its power to account for the (incipient, non-identically repeated) *unity* of participants in gift-exchange. For it can be argued that the

(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978). See also Michael J. Loux (ed.), *Universals and Particulars: Readings in Ontology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1970), J.P. Moreland, *Universals* (Chesham : Acumen, 2001), and the next footnote.

⁶² I will not attempt to relate precisely my use of “communicable” with the mediaeval *communicabile* and *incommunicabile*. For I am not interested in the metaphysical status of universals which are ontic constituents of things, such as “animal”, “humanity” or “horseness”, nor in the status of universals which are ontic “accidents” such as “white” or “whiteness”. Yet with this qualification in mind, and if Jorge Gracia’s analysis is correct, it seems my position on “sameness” is closest to a stronger (more realist) version of “moderate realism”, such as the realism of Duns Scotus. For the latter, “things like nature do have some unity and being (not existence, but nevertheless some ontological status [I would ask: virtuality?]) in addition to the unity and being they have as individuals. Horseness, for example, in addition to being this horseness, that is, the horseness of this horse and of none else, has in some sense some being and unity which is not the unity and being of this horse.” By contrast, a weaker version of moderate realism “borders on nominalism. For it holds that the natures that exist as individuated have no unity and being except for the unity and being which they have as individuals” and (in the case of Aquinas) as concepts with merely intentional existence. Jorge J.E. Gracia, *Introduction to the Problem of Individuation in the Early Middle Ages* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 33. Gracia cites Duns Scotus, *Opus oxoniense* II, d. 3, q.1 and Thomas Aquinas, *On Being and Essence*, ch. 3. Regarding “the incommunicable” status of persons, see John F. Crosby, “Incommunicability” in *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), 41-81. According to Roman law, *Persona est sui iuris alteri incommunicabilis* (41).

incommunicable as such cannot account for unity between many. If the potential expressed in each participant in gift-exchange were simply an “atomic” potential—one which is fixed to just one individual, and so unable to be concretely shared—then the dialogical event of gift-exchange would reduce, in a way that seems problematic, to an externally added series of expressions of these merely-individual potentials. Jean-Luc Nancy appears to be making basically the same claim, when he denies that the power of the “collective” is formed by simply pooling together the individually “interior” power of each member of that collective:

[I]f Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the ‘with’ that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition. This operates in the same way as a collective [*collégial*] power: power is neither exterior to the members of the collective [*collège*] nor interior to each one of them, but rather consists in the collectivity [*collégialité*] as such.⁶³

Note that Nancy also denies that collective power is “exterior” to the members of the collective. *Collégial* power, by definition, cannot come into expression and actuality without the involvement (mediation) of individual members. Essentially the same point was made above.⁶⁴

However, what is sought in the rest of this chapter is a *more developed* argument to the effect that the incommunicable as such cannot account for unity between many. The way forward from here is to consider that on this account of gift-exchange, such “unity” must include the “ethical” openness of each to the other.⁶⁵ The claim to be made now reads as follows. If *E*, the expression of gift-giving performed by subject *A*, is *reducible* to the expression of *A* taken as an individual—if *E* does not arise from the virtuality of some *communicable* form, while at the same time being the expression of *A*—then it is hard to see how *E* could be enacted for

⁶³ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 30.

⁶⁴ “An Hegelian Clarification.” However, I do not pretend that Nancy would approve of my *metaphysical* response to the problem of shared power (i.e., my invocation of “the virtuality of the communicable”).

⁶⁵ This may well represent an important difference of emphasis when compared with the “collective”, whose members “take a stand” together.

the sake of another person after all. The problem here is not that such a “nominalistic” expression—as opposed to an “iconic” or “poetic” expression in which the singular subject lets the communicable/universal bring *itself* forth in truth⁶⁶—the problem is not that a nominalistic expression is unable to be an act of self-sacrifice, one in which no good comes to the giver. For if one agrees with the critique of unilateralism offered earlier, then the impossibility of being purely altruistic is not actually a problem at all. As demonstrated below, the problem is rather that such a mode of expression (assuming its possibility) appears unable to enact (non-self-sacrificial) transcendence toward the other, *where this is read in terms of “affirmative mirroring” of the other*. In one respect, of course, to say that the primary end of gift-giving could not be nominalistic expression (self-realisation), is not to disagree with Derrida or Marion at all. Yet one departs from these French thinkers as soon as one reads being-for-the-other in terms of “affirmative mirroring.” What is meant by the latter must now be explained.

3.3.2. Preparation, Phase 2: Milbank and Bruaire on Mirroring

Milbank first introduces the theme of the “mirror” in the course of his essay, “The Gift and the Mirror”:

Marion explains how one has here [in the sexual act] the most radical and defining instance of the *adonné* [the gifted], where what I am given is myself and therefore, as Claude Bruaire ... expressed it, I must as a recipient give myself to myself in a way that ensures that my original relationship to myself is a reflective or auto-affective one. There is here invoked a very interesting co-implication between the gift, on the one hand, and the mirror, on the other. It seems that not only every gift that a man might give a woman is really a mirror in which she might regard herself, but that all gifts are like this—as indeed neo-Platonism already understood. For to be a spirit, to think at all, is to receive one’s being and unity and

⁶⁶ Sean McGrath, “Toward a Technology that Allows the Beautiful to Occur” *Animus* 8 (2003). www.swgc.mun.ca/animus

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even the being and unity of all that one surveys as the gift that one is oneself. This demands reflexivity—my *prise de conscience* in repeating as me the giving of the gift to me.⁶⁷

Following a 20th Century French Catholic theologian influenced by Schelling and Hegel,⁶⁸ Milbank links the giftedness of Creation with the receptivity of the *spiritual* creature. “Spirit” denotes the reflexivity of the recipient—which is to say, the coincidence of a gift received as such, and the recipient. The created person consciously receives from God the gift that he or she *is*:

Claude Bruaire argued that, if the Creation is the first receiving of gift such that it is, in itself, through and through gift without remainder, then it must originally subsist as the reflexive reception of itself as gift ... [T]o suppose that there could rather have been a created cosmos without spirit, would be to fail to see that conscious spirit just is the reflexive reception of itself as gift—which must be the fundamental hidden and defining fact of creation. Creation is first of all a mirror as gift, and therefore it is first of all spirit.⁶⁹

At this point Milbank shows his predilection for *Neoplatonic* motifs. He links the endlessness of our giving with our constitutive inability to reflect perfectly the primal generosity of the One God:

Yet this reflexivity can never be perfect, for one can never, as Plotinus and Proclus put it, recapture in reflection or self-giving the original unity (or one can add beyond neo-Platonism,

⁶⁷ John Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”, 267. One can presume that Milbank puts man in the position of the mirroring giver and woman in the position of the mirrored recipient not because he believes that this situation cannot be reversed, but because for him beauty has a stronger and more obvious link with femininity. For Milbank on sexual difference see *BR*, 205-10, and Milbank, *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2009), 137, 139, 154, 364-70.

⁶⁸ Cf. Antonio López, *Spirit's Gift: The Metaphysical Insight of Claude Bruaire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

⁶⁹ “... which means the giving of a gift to itself, in an inadequate attempt to make the return of gratitude to the ultimate source.” Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”, 278 (see 276-84 for discussion of Bruaire). Milbank cites Claude Bruaire, *L'Être et Esprit*, 51-87. The theological context of the idea that the creature is already gift(ed), is the debate over how to think the gratuity of God's grace. Milbank draws on Bruaire in his understanding of grace as a gift “without contrast” (i.e., it is not as if the gratuity of grace consists in some unnecessary arrival at a purely natural, non-gifted substrate). See John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005).

original being) of the donating source to which as spirit we must assume ourselves to be in debt...⁷⁰

Milbank shows next his predilection also for *transcendental* claims and arguments— notwithstanding his aversion toward certain Kantian themes, and his insistence that tradition-based theology should position philosophy and not vice versa⁷¹—though here the use of the transcendental is no longer tied up with Kantian subjectivity:⁷²

[The] endlessness of our debt is the transcendental precondition for the possibility that finite spirits may give without end, despite their finitude.⁷³

For Milbank, following Marion, this need to “give without end” prompts us to give forward. Thus others “will receive our gifts once again as mirrors—of us and of themselves—since they are *adonnés* in relation to us.”⁷⁴ In the argument to follow, “mirroring” is read as one person’s expression toward the other of the goodness (and beauty) of the other. While this follows Milbank’s use as shown above, the themes of divine simplicity, individual “spirit” and finite self-reflexion will be put aside. Moreover, the goodness reflected to the other in such mirroring will be interpreted *further*, in the light of the claim that the Same Good (Gift)

⁷⁰ Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”, 267.

⁷¹ Milbank, *TST2*; “Only Theology Overcomes Metaphysics” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 36-52 and “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics: On the Modalities of Terror” in Connor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler, Jr, (ed), *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 452-499. For Milbank against the neutrality of will in Kant see, e.g., “Evil: Darkness and Silence” in *BR*, esp. 4. Against Kant’s valorization of pure duty/altruism, see, e.g., “Grace” “The Midwinter Sacrifice” in *BR* and “The Ethics of Self-Sacrifice” *First Things* 91 (1999) 33-38. Against the Kantian sublime see, e.g., “Policing the Sublime: A Critique of the Sociology of Religion”, in *TST2*, 101-4, “The Sublime in Kierkegaard” in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 131-156 [reprint of “The Sublime in Kierkegaard”, *The Heythrop Journal*, 37 (1996), 298-321] and “Knowledge: The Theological Critique of Philosophy in Hamann and Jacobi” in *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology*, ed. John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999), 21-37. Paul DeHart shows how Milbank’s fierce anti-Kantianism slants his reading of ancient and contemporary authors. Paul DeHart, “On Being Heard But Not Seen: Milbank and Lash on Aquinas, Analogy and Agnosticism”, *Modern Theology* 26/2 (2010), 243-77.

⁷² A useful reference here is Jeff Malpas (ed.), *From Kant to Davidson: Philosophy and the Idea of the Transcendental* (London: Routledge, 2003).

⁷³ Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”, 268. Robyn Horner is troubled by the idea that to be gifted means to be in debt; see her *Rethinking God as Gift: Marion, Derrida, and the Limits of Phenomenology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2001), 17, 183. However, “debt” can be understood in more than one way. To be “indebted” to God, for example, need not mean anything more than the fact that we “belong” to God—inasmuch as it is in him that we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)—and that what is most interior to us is ordered back to its divine source. If our “indebtedness” is inescapable, unable to be reversed by some equal payment back to God, this does not mean that God is some entrepreneur who *enslaves* his subjects in eternal debt.

⁷⁴ Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror”, 268.

calls for plural expression through time. If the reader detects the appearance of “spirit” again below, this should be taken primarily in the guise of communicable *pneuma* rather than as individual *nous*.⁷⁵

3.3.3. Preparation, Phase 3: Milbank and Augustine on the Common Good

It is to be noted that the *shared* enjoyment and expression of the Good to be explored shortly, is an Augustinian theme that Milbank takes up explicitly in *Being Reconciled*:

[Augustine] also asserts that the will wills a good *beyond* the good of virtue ... [This is] an inaccessible divine good, which can never belong to an individual, and can only be enjoyed in common. This superabundant good is shared between us, and never possessed: just like sunlight, says Augustine ... This good, since it is infinite and above us, and held securely by God, *can* be lost by us, unlike virtue as virtue. Nevertheless, insecure will, which should be guided by secure virtue, still takes the lead over virtue, because true virtue is less fundamentally a possession than it is a sharing in the common good.⁷⁶

Thus Milbank takes up the “drastic participatory tension between the infinitely general and the finitely particular” in Augustine’s account of the will in its relation to the Good. He detects a certain “proto-Romantic” dimension to Augustine’s thought. For the latter, according to Milbank, “enjoyment in common does not inhibit individual expression, rather each is the precondition of the other ... [‘Participatory will’] at once validates individual expressiveness and collective sharing ...”⁷⁷ On this vision, the Good is common and

⁷⁵ For this distinction see Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 370-84.

⁷⁶ Milbank continues: “Such sharing in what surpasses us is only ever to be attained by desire, even if a true desire, for Augustine, involves a kind of true, but inchoate, envisaging ...” Thus the “inaccessibility” of the divine good is not absolute (or “noumenal”) for Milbank. *BR*, 10, Milbank’s emphasis. Milbank cites Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*.

⁷⁷ “However, if desire exceeds virtue in the direction of the more common and universal, then it *also*, according to *De Libero Arbitrio*, exceeds virtue in the direction of the more individual and particular. For the will is linked not just to discrimination of right from wrong, and the following of truth rather than falsehood, but also with idiosyncratic, but equally valid, moral and aesthetic preferences. There is a real ‘proto-romantic’ dimension here. Thus, Augustine says, some in a landscape will admire more the ‘height of a mountain’, other the ‘verdure of a forest’, others the ‘pulsing tranquillity of the sea’; and in like fashion the cleaving of desire to the good refracts it according to our specific local affinities. In this way, the will for Augustine at once directs us beyond private virtue to the common good, and yet at the same time does so through a desire necessarily more individuated than virtues like patience, taken in the abstract, which through privately possessed like gold, show, also like gold, the same identical quality in all instances. This is why ‘will’ for Augustine names the drastic

inexhaustible, and yet must be received always “according to our own unique affinities”. In sum, for (Milbank’s) Augustine, the perfection of the will *exceeds* individual virtue and coincides with sharing the common good, since the will is called to participate in the *excessive* Good: “To will here means to be moved beyond oneself towards a sharing and ontological distribution ... of the inexhaustible common good.”⁷⁸

3.3.4. Preparation, Phase 4

Returning now to where the argument against “atomic virtuality” left off, recall that the following claims were made above. First, if one denies that the primary end of gift-giving is nominalistic expression (self-realisation), this is not yet to disagree with Derrida or Marion. However, one departs from these French thinkers, as soon as one reads being-for-the-other in terms of “affirmative mirroring.” The claim to be *argued* for can now be presented as follows. *Affirmative mirroring* of the other—an expression of the goodness of the other, to whom it is good to offer this expression, give this gift—cannot be thought in terms of the expression of (the giver’s) atomic virtuality, or as (the giver’s) merely-individual self-realisation.

Implicit here is the claim that the destiny of gift is to appear *as* gift to the recipient; only in this way, it is claimed, is the gift given as a *mirror* of the other. While Derrida and Marion are at pains to protect the recipient from any appearance of the gift that would bind the recipient in debt or gratitude to a known giver (for such appearance and such a bond supposedly contradict the gift’s departure-in-favour-of-the-recipient), Milbank reaffirms unequivocally the *ideality* of the arrival of gift. For Milbank, the event of the gift involves the

participatory tension between the infinitely general and the finitely particular ... [According to this vision] enjoyment in common does not inhibit individual expression, rather each is the precondition of the other ... [‘Participatory will’] at once validates individual expressiveness and collective sharing ...” Milbank, *BR*, 11. Milbank’s emphasis.

⁷⁸ *BR*, 12. See also pp. 162-3, 178, 192 for mentions of the “common good” by which Milbank means *bonum commune communitatis*.

event of a certain image of the other. Thus the gift-event includes and so calls for the recipient's *reception* of this proposed vision (a reception which entails giving again, differently). On this view, the gift that remains hidden (*qua* gift) from the recipient, while arriving materially as a thing or benefit, has not eventuated as gift—at least not on the side of the recipient.⁷⁹ From the side of the giver, it should be added that on this picture the eventuation of gift *there* (the initial departure of gift toward the givee) is nothing other than the giver's expression of a vision for the other. (Of course, to express as giver this vision for the other is already to accept a role in relation to both the other and the gift. Likewise, for the recipient to accept the vision proposed for him by the giver is to agree to the self-positioning adopted by the giver. This suggests, in accordance with the reflections given in §3.2. above, that the event of gift is a complex, and ongoing, act of mutual positioning about the gift/s).

So what is rationale behind the claim that atomic virtuality (assuming, for the sake of argument, there can be such a thing) cannot give rise to affirmative mirroring? Two ways to this conclusion offered below. The first deals with the commensurability of virtuality and actuality in the abstract, while the second way develops this position in more concrete terms, by questioning the possibility of an affirmative mirroring of the other, and by reading the gift in terms of excess. In preparation, consider that by definition, an “atomic” virtuality tends toward the fruition (expression and actuality) of the individual whose virtuality it is, and this in an unmediated, pure fashion (i.e., independently of any self-expression of the communicable). This image of virtuality implies that the individual is dynamically ordered toward its own expressive actuality, and that this realisation of individual potential is not at

⁷⁹ Any fair attempt to contrast this position with that of Jean-Luc Marion, without overstating their difference, would actually be quite involved. In §9 of *Being Given* Jean-Luc Marion explores various situations in which the gift might be able to occur in its aneconomic purity, by virtue of the “Bracketing of the Givee”. Then in §§10 and 11 Marion explores the bracketing of the giver and then of the gift, respectively. Moreover, for Marion, certain gifts such as the gift of power (§11), and the gift of paternity (see the final section of “The Reason of the Gift”) are already reduced to pure givenness by virtue of their “irreality”. Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, “The Reason of the Gift”, trans. Shane Mackinley and Nicolas de Warren, in Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (eds), *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 101-134.

the same time a singular manifestation of the communicable as it *gives itself* (to adopt Marion's phrase). In short, the expressive realisation of the individual-as-giver is separated from the expressive realisation of the communicable; the singular act of giving does not involve the self-giving of the communicable.

3.3.5. *First Way*

The problem is that on this picture, the end toward which the individual is dynamically ordered as (potential) giver, *is simply and reducibly* the expressive actuality of this individual. But it is hard to see how an individual giver thought in this fashion could be generously open toward the other. Such, at least, is the result if one admits the following premise: *the actuality toward which a virtuality tends (not as to a distinct object, but as to an enriched state of its being) is commensurate to that virtuality* (that is, if the metaphysical subject of some virtuality is an individual *A*, then the actuality to which it gives rise is the actuality of *A* precisely, and not of some other entity, individual or otherwise). The method followed here, then, is putting into question—not taking from granted—the possibility of an individual agent's being ordered toward an actuality not reducible to its own. On the basis of the principle of the commensurability of virtuality and actuality (stated in italics immediately above) it can be argued reasonably that the virtuality *V* by which an individual is ordered toward another individual and/or a higher or “wider” good, so as to be able to offer a truly *relational* expression of self, cannot be some atomic virtuality of that individual. Rather, *V* must be the virtuality of a communicable entity *E*—where *A*, the individual, is different to yet dynamically united with *E* so as to be an expressive mediator of *E*. (Alternatively, perhaps *V* may be the virtuality of a communicable entity which this individual essentially *is*, such that *A* is not *merely* an individual, but is paradoxically incommunicable and communicable at once, depending on which way we consider this “strange” entity. This possibility need not be explored here; all that is of interest at this stage is the apparent impossibility of a relational

expression arising from an atomic virtuality. Another possibility can be immediately discounted, namely, that the giver might, by giving, bring into expression some merely-individual virtuality which is somehow proper to the *other*, the recipient. For, by definition, if the virtuality tied to some subject is *incommunicable*, it cannot be released into expression by any subject besides this one.)⁸⁰

3.3.6. *Second Way*

It was claimed that an individual subject of atomic virtuality could not be generously open toward the other. But here, in this more concrete form of the argument, such generosity is read in terms of mirroring specifically. The claim now reads: It is hard to see how such an individual *could express, in his giving, the gift's givability in relation to the other (the gift's "seeking out" affirmatively the other-as-recipient)*. Surely, all that such a giver could present to the recipient, is his self-appropriation and self-achievement as "giver". Here the other/recipient would figure merely as a means for the self-aggrandisement of the "giver", the very situation that Derrida and Marion oppose (and rightly so):

The simple intention to give, insofar as it carries the intentional meaning of the gift, suffices to make a return payment to oneself. The simple consciousness of the gift right away sends itself back the *gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude.*⁸¹

⁸⁰ For the Aristotelian/Thomistic link between goodness and actuality, see Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), esp. the following contributions: Scott MacDonald, "The Metaphysics of Goodness and the Doctrine of the Transcendentals", 31-55; Jan A. Aersten, "Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good", 56-73; Ralph McInerny, "Saint Thomas on *De hebdomadibus*", 74-97. The problem of self-transcendence and the "self-curvature" of nature is dealt with in Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001) and Thomas M. Osborne, Jr, *Love of God and Love of Self in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

⁸¹ Derrida, *Given Time*, 23. My emphasis.

The argument pursued in this section is unpacked—and Milbank’s reading of the gift as “mirror” is developed further—as follows, in terms of the *co-operative mediation* and *double belonging of expressible gift*. It is hoped that, in this way, the aporetic conclusions of Derrida (“the simple intention to give ... suffices to make a return payment to oneself”) may be avoided.⁸²

Compared with (a) the idea that what is able to be given is *fully* possessed independently of its being-given-away, it seems closer to the truth to say (b) that the giver is only properly united with the gift in the act of giving the gift in accordance with its inherent givability.⁸³ Still, this does not go far enough in thinking the event of gift as an affirmative mirroring of the other. For (b), on a first reading at least,⁸⁴ is still compatible with the idea that the gift comes to its entire expression in and through the giver alone, i.e., independently of any subsequent act of reception, gratitude or counter-giving. But arguably, if the giver comports himself to the gift according to the (perhaps implicit) idea that the gift’s entire expression is immediate and singular in the giver—if the giver relates himself to the gift as if he were the full expressive horizon or site of the gift—then the recipient is not lovingly or generously mirrored, as one with whom the gift *belongs*. On the dialogical reading of gift pursued here, *the truth of the gift is its belonging to giver-and-recipient, together, inasmuch as the virtuality of the gift is only able to be released and expressed through time co-operatively*. According

⁸² Linked with this is the overcoming of the *problematic* notion of “identity” to which Derrida eludes, following the previously quoted passage. “And this is produced as soon as there is a subject, as soon as donor and donee are constituted as identical, identifiable subjects, capable of identifying themselves by keeping and naming themselves”. Derrida, *Given Time*, 23.

⁸³ Says John Milbank in “The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority” in *New Blackfriars* 85/996 (2004), 212-38: “[P]olitical rule is for Aquinas *communication*, an imparting of power which must take place if it can, *else power falsely reserved will fester*. This means that every time one rules, one loses ruling in part, except in the sense of fully retaining the capacity for ruling, or even *increasing it through its very exercise*. Even in the case of God he loses no rule because in utterly sharing it, he is sharing ruling, which is in itself a mode of sharing” (224, my emphasis). “Thomas Aquinas, *Contra Impugnantes*, I cap 4 para 14. Here he cites Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*: ‘Everything that is not lessened by being imparted, is not, if it be possessed without being communicated, possessed as it ought to be possessed.’” (224n20, my emphasis).

⁸⁴ Another reading of (b) does go far enough, since it takes “giving” and “givability” according to the modifications proposed below.

to this reading, the self-aggrandising giver falsely arrogates all this belonging to himself, and assumes that he possesses gift totally, when in fact its ongoing expression *escapes* him; he fails to see and express the truth that the site of the gift's ongoing expression is beyond him at essential moments (for to accept this is already humility). On this account the gift "needs" the recipient, is "destined" to pass that way in order to find expressive actuality there, differently; this is precisely what the gift's "givability" consists in. Thus the giver is not the sole guardian of gift—rather "we" are the guardian of gift (though perhaps this "we" is incipient and ever-widening).

The falseness of self-aggrandising giving can therefore be read as follows. Such a "giver" fails to express the gift *as exceeding himself (the giver)*, and thus fails to enact the self-manifestation of gift in its givability (its belonging to many expressive mediators). One is led also to the following hermeneutic of the gift (the gift in its "difference", the gift as excess): *The expression of excess is a condition for enacting the gift. That is, the giver truly enacts the gift only where the gift expresses, through the giver, its excessive difference from this giver.* Thus, on the side of the giver, *the event of the gift is the event of the unity-and-difference between excessive gift (the communicable) and exceeded giver (the incommunicable).* On this reading, the gift's differentiating itself, as excess, from the giver, *is* its coming forward *as* gift; this gift-event is what occurs in and as the giver's giving. The differentiation of giver-and-gift—an event of differentiation which is also the (non-exclusive) *union* of giver and gift—this signifies already the belonging-together of givee and gift, thus mirroring the givee affirmatively—which is to say, *thus giving the gift*. For the gift is truly given, is actually receivable by the givee, insofar as the gift shows itself to belong to her, to be destined for her—insofar as the gift *approaches* her and *mirrors* her as one who is to bear this gift—in short, insofar as the gift *calls her by uniting with and differing from the giver*.

This provides us with a promising response to the claim that the appearance of the giver and/or gift, either reflexively to the giver, or transitively to the recipient, can only serve the self-aggrandising of the giver. For once the gift is understood to be excessive (communicable, plurally expressible, belonging-to-many)—or more precisely, once *Gift*, or the “spirit” or virtuality of the gift, is understood to be excessive—it can be seen that the manifestation of gift in its unity with the giver, is equally a manifestation of its *difference* from the giver, which implies that the appearance of the giver as such, and of the gift as such, calls the givee into the embrace of the gift’s excess (and from the other side, reinforces the giver’s *difference* from gift, and thus his humility). Far from humiliating the givee, the presentation of the giver in her belonging with excessive gift (her being a source or initiating expressor of excessive gift) in fact signifies equally the belonging-together of givee and gift. If the giver truly gives—if he concedes humbly to the gift in its givability, to the gift as excess—then *his coming forward as giver via the gift is already the calling forth of the recipient into the affirming embrace of Gift*. However the giver appears as such to the recipient—in person, *in absentia*, or even as an anonymous donor—s/he comes forward as giver *insofar as s/he makes way for the recipient, figuring the latter affirmatively* (consider, for example, the giving of a welcoming smile). The giver figures (intransitive) *as* a giver just to the extent that he figures (transitive) the recipient *as* recipient, and this in a welcoming, generous way (the recipient being affirmed as belonging with Gift, as a destination of Gift). One can therefore add this “figural” paradox⁸⁵ to the paradox of clarity/mystery already pointed out by Milbank,⁸⁶ both paradoxes express the excess of Gift *vis-a-vis* its participants.

⁸⁵ A suggestion posed to Jean-Luc Marion: following this path, and focussing on such phenomena as the smile, the phenomenological reduction to “pure givenness” would make way for the “figurally paradoxical” nature of givenness. Or is this precisely Marion’s point in *Being Given*? Cf. Nancy in *Being Singular Plural*: “[E]very position is also a dis-position, and, considering that takes the place of and takes place in the position, all appearance is co-appearance [*com-parution*]” (12).

⁸⁶ See the end of §2.9.1. above.

This “second way” in favour of the notion of communicable virtuality, can now be brought to its conclusion. It can be said that the self-aggrandising giver holds onto the gift spiritually or symbolically even as he sends it forth materially; his deployment of “gift” is not a humble and truthful *sharing* of the self-expression of gift. Here the “glory”, as it were, of the giver, is not in itself a sharing of glory, whereas in true giving, glory *is* by way of sharing.⁸⁷ From this reading it follows that, if the giver were to express a merely atomic virtuality—one which, by definition, does not exceed the individual giver, and is not destined for plural expression—then his giving could not possibly be a manifestation of gift, could not be an expression which mirrors and so affirms the other as a fitting site for gift’s ongoing, plural expression.

3.4. Participating in Gift

This vision might be generalised as follows, so as to include in its scope the act of reception. To participate in Gift, as giver *and/or recipient*, is to actively allow Gift to differ in and from oneself; it is to let happen the Event of differentiation (between participant and Gift, and thus between participants in Gift), which is no less an Event of gathering-together (in both these “dimensions” simultaneously). It was claimed above that the giver, conceding to the excess of Gift, manifests the plural belonging of Gift. Far from self-aggrandising, she mirrors the other affirmatively—as a fitting recipient and mediating site (re-expressor) of Gift. But it can now be added that the recipient’s acceptance of the gift is *also* a concession to the excess of Gift. The recipient accepts that *he too* is called to express Gift, thus recognising and reenacting Gift’s excess *vis-à-vis* the giver. And insofar as he *receives* the gift as something *from another*—only present for him in its truth *insofar as the giver allowed (and allows)*

⁸⁷ “Jesus said, ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. (If God is glorified in him,) God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him at once.’” John 13:31-32, NAB. See also John 12:23-28.

himself to be exceeded by Gift—and so does not simply *appropriate* it, the recipient also repeats and manifests Gift’s excess *vis-à-vis himself*.

The recipient *repeats* this, for inversely, the giver’s conceding to excessive Gift on its way to another manifests already Gift’s exceeding *the recipient*—as just said, the offering of gift is not the neutral expropriation of an object to be unilaterally appropriated, but an invitation to a *shared* Act or Life. To repeat, the recipient’s acceptance of the gift is a letting-happen (*Gelassenheit*) of Gift-as-excess, a letting oneself be exceeded by Gift—but this act takes as its presupposition the Gift’s actively exceeding *in the giver’s act*, as the gift is presented. The excess of Gift, over and between giver *and* recipient, is only available to the recipient *qua* recipient—only able to be manifest again, as the recipient lets herself be exceeded by Gift (and simultaneously repeats its excess over the giver)—insofar as it manifestly exceeds the giver (and recipient) *with the giver’s consent*. The excess of Gift is not presented to the recipient directly, purely, and immediately, but only *in and with the giver’s conceding* to excessive Gift, via the presentation of the gift. The giver’s “melting” in abeyance to Gift coincides with the manifestation of Gift as excess (over both giver and recipient), and it is this manifestation which the recipient accepts as a word for himself. Yet this word is not *just* for himself. That is, the recipient, after the giver, repeats differently the birth of the Same Word—the truth of the belonging-together, in unity-and-difference, of Gift, giver and recipient.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ My account of the “virtuality of the communicable”—though not its development in terms of the event of Gift—is in *some* respects similar to the extrapolations from physical “field-theory” made by (i) systematic theologian Wolfhart Pannenberg and (ii) Jesuit process theologian Joseph Bracken. The former explains the event of intersubjectivity in terms of a uniting ground or field called (the Holy) Spirit. See Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 370-84; and articles by Min and by Harvie cited at note 37 above. In his response to the problem of dynamic unity between many, Bracken draws upon the systems theory of Ervin Laszlo and the process thought of Alfred North Whitehead, though he finds the latter’s metaphysic to be too individualistic in the end: “[S]ocieties, both in the technical Whiteheadian sense and in the common understanding of the term ... should be understood as overlapping energy fields, each with an intelligible pattern corresponding to the energy-events (concrescence of actual occasions) taking place within it.” Joseph A. Bracken, *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1991), 67-8. See also pp. 43-56 (“collective agency”), pp. 67-73 (fields and society) and pp.

3.5. Conclusion

It appears that to think that the individual is the subject of a merely-individual virtuality, and thus of a movement toward a merely-individual *fruition* or *telos*—by nature, habit or inspiration, it matters little—is to contradict the logic of the gift. It is unlikely, then, that the primary end of giving is the realisation of oneself as an individual. For this reason it seems far more promising to think of the virtuality that comes to expression in the act of giving as that of a *communicable* entity (“Gift”), one which somehow overreaches giver *and* recipient in their distinctness (and perhaps tends to reach out further still). Before asking how such a communicable entity might be possible (chapters 5 to 7), it is worth giving more flesh (in chapter 4) to the vision offered in this chapter, and responding to a few objections.

117-8 (“corporate agency”). More recently, see Bracken, *Subjectivity, Objectivity, and Intersubjectivity: A New Paradigm for Religion and Science* (West Conshohocken, Pennsylvania: Templeton Foundation Press, 2009). Oliver Davies reads “Being” as the medium between self and other in “Being and Love: Towards a Christian Ontology of Difference” in his *A Theology of Compassion*, 138-163.

4. The Ontology of Gift

4.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the ontology of communicable Gift proposed in the previous chapter as a supplement to Milbank's account of gift-exchange, is developed in more detail. *First*, four objections to this ontology are addressed. Further objections might also be imagined, but these shall have to suffice here. The last of these responses leads into the first topic of further commentary: *second*, the "paradoxical" nature of the teleology of the communicable. Gift is "for many insofar as it is for itself". That is, Gift is destined from within to give itself to and for many, just because that is the manner in which it must eventuate or come into expressive act. Topics that follow are *third*, the nature of Gift's "indwelling"; *fourth*, the explanatory scope of the notion of Sameness in regard to the dynamics of interpersonal unity; *fifth*, the relation between Gift and gift; *sixth*, local and general horizons of gift-exchange; and *seventh*, a brief comparison with Milbank's account of gift-exchange.

4.2. Objections

In the previous chapter, it was argued that participating in the "virtuality of the communicable" is a condition for the genuine expression of gift. It was claimed that communicable Gift belongs¹ to many inasmuch as it tends toward plural and reciprocal expression, in accordance with the form of Gift's eventuation. Certain "aporias" attend the gift only if, against this, the primary subject (and object) of "return" is assumed to be the incommunicable *individual*, in accordance with a persistent nominalistic bias. The exchange and recognition of gift(s) was thought otherwise than nominalistically, in terms of a self-

¹ The primary sense of "belonging" in play here is "being destined for" someone or "givable to" someone, rather than "being actually given to" someone.

expressive and self-returning *communicable* entity (“Gift”). On this account, to enact and express Gift is to be true to the plural belonging of Gift. To truly give a gift is to allow Gift to show itself, via the gift, as belonging to many—in a particular way *to the recipient*, but no less between *us*. It is to let happen the event of Gift, which is just the self-sharing of Gift, and this is nothing without the *showing of* Gift (double genitive) as communicable or *to-be-shared*. Again, according to this ontology, to give is to let Gift exceed and differ manifestly in relation to oneself (the giver). The giver, conceding to the excess of Gift, manifests the plural belonging of Gift. Far from self-aggrandising, she mirrors the other affirmatively—as a fitting recipient and mediating site (re-expressor) of Gift.

The responses given below to objections to such an ontology, are fairly brief; they merely represent suggestions for further inquiry. *First*, if one understands the givee as one “fitting site” for the gift’s plural expression as above, is this perhaps against the primacy of gift—the gift which, according to Jean-Luc Marion’s phenomenological reduction, gives itself on the basis of itself, and for no reason apart from itself? Does this subject the gift to the logic of desert, or at least to some other *ratio* which is extraneous to the gift in its gratuity?² If the gratuitous movement of the gift is to be thought starting from the gift’s own givability, does this exclude thinking givability in terms of a “fitting site” or destination of gift? It would appear not—nothing on the account of givability sketched above implies that the gift serves something other than itself. If the gift (or Gift) is communicable, such that it eventuates in the manner of communication or sharing (or in Milbank’s words, as asymmetrical reciprocity and non-identical repetition), that is not to say that this ongoing, always-differing expression of

² Jean-Luc Marion, “The Reason of the Gift”, trans. Shane Mackinley and Nicolas de Warren, in Ian Leask and Eoin Cassidy (eds), *Givenness and God: Questions of Jean-Luc Marion* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 101-134. “The gift that gives (itself) gives only on the basis of itself, hence without owing anything to another reason (or cause) than itself” (126). “Neither does the giver decide on some gift because of some potential beneficiary—the number of needy discourages, and the impudence of the claim disgusts, without allowing one to decide ... [T]hat can happen only if the gift wells up from itself and imposes itself as such on its giver” (127).

gift is ordered toward an external end. On this account, the excessiveness of gift is what makes for the playfulness of gift (its tending to pass back and forth, indefinitely) and this playfulness, by definition, need not be seen as having any reason apart from itself. Indeed, Marion himself affirms that the gift, in one way or another, befits its recipient. For Marion the gift “wells up from itself and imposes itself as such on its giver”. It does this by

coming (*advenant*) to this giver as something to give, as that which demands that one give it (*donandum est*)—by appearing among many other objects or beings like itself, in the midst of which the gift imposes itself of itself: as so useful for a distress close to its actual (and provisional) proprietor, that henceforth he or she must become the leaseholder whose time has expired, and finally the giver...³

This brings up a *second* objection, from the opposite side. If gift/Gift serves nothing but itself, does this not imply that those who participate in gift/Gift are “alienated”—that they are “subordinated” in a negative sense, even “used” as a means for the self-actualisation or self-expression of gift/Gift? In response, it can be said that this does not follow if the gift somehow bears forward the affirming presence of the giver. As Milbank says,

... so-called primitive societies do not make our divisions between public contract and private gift, nor between the free active subject and the inert object. Hence for these societies, a thing exchanged is not a commodity, but a gift; and it is not *alienated* from the giver but expresses his personality, so that the giver is *in* the gift, he goes *with* the gift.⁴

On this account, to receive the gift is to recognise gratefully the giver’s generosity, thus doing justice to the giver’s inalienable self. If the affirming giver “goes with the gift”, then “a return

³ Marion continues, “The example of this silent constraint—political (devolutions: Lear to his daughters), moral (renunciations: the Princess of Cleves), religious (consecrations: the stripping of Francis of Assisi), or others—abound to the point of dispensing us from describing them further.” Marion, “The Reason of the Gift”, 127.

⁴ “Precisely for this reason, a return on the gift is always due to the giver, unlike our modern ‘free gift’. Yet this gift is still a gift and not a commodity subject to contract, because it returns in a slightly different form at a not quite predictable time, bearing with it also the subjectivity of the counter-giver” *BR*, 167. Milbank’s emphasis. He cites Marcel Mauss, *The Gift*; Georges Davey, *La Foi Jurée* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1922); Bronislaw Manilowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961).

on the gift is always due to the giver, unlike our modern ‘free gift.’”⁵ Likewise, to give the gift is to envision and mirror the recipient as one to whom the gift belongs (is destined).⁶ The event of Gift, then, need not be seen as something independent from the mutual recognition, and festively shared “glory”, of inalienable persons—at least not if the unilateralism of Derrida and Marion is avoided as above. If the event of Gift is that to which the participants in Gift are ordered (intimately, from within, in the middle voice, by grace/gift), the realisation of this End is the *upbuilding and letting-be (Freigabe) of persons-in-relation*. To be ordered toward an End which is different from oneself—different insofar as this End is excessive and so plurally mediated—is not alienating, just *because* such an End is “different” in this sense. For this End gratuitously *includes* one’s own freedom and good (whereas to be ordered merely to the good of *another individual* could well be alienating) and binds this radically with the freedom and good of others (whereas to be ordered merely to one’s own good could well be meaningless, devoid of the relationality that makes for personal ek-sistence).⁷

Third, one might attempt to avoid “the metaphysics of the communicable” outlined above, by asserting that the social unity of those involved in gift-exchange can be explained otherwise. Perhaps the dialogical play of gift and counter-gift need only be analysed as series of meaningful exchanges. The meaning of a gift given is its calling for its (grateful) reception; gratitude and the counter-gift take their meanings from the gift-giving to which they respond.

⁵ *BR*, 167. See also 184-86, on profession. “[The doctor] *goes* with what he does, becomes the gift he bestows; this generosity *is* himself, not an ego, but something expended if it is to be renewed. ... Therefore as Marcel Mauss rightly argued [see the final chapter of *The Gift*], the idea of the profession continues to be bound up with the notion of the gift” (185), Milbank’s emphasis, typo corrected.

⁶ “Where life is realized and enjoyed as passage, there wealth lies in glorious expenditure, and personal freedom in acts of generosity which bonds us to others. This passage is, as we have seen, a passage of gift, which cannot begin or cease to be gift, if it is ever to be given at all, *since a thing given is regarded as always having had this fundamental destiny, if we are not to devalue the recipient*; while a gift must go on giving itself, if it is not to lapse into mere possession, in forgetfulness of the donor.” *BR*, 181. My emphasis.

⁷ “Everything, then, passes *between* us ... The “between” is the stretching out [*distension*] and distance opened by the singular as such, as its spacing of meaning. That which does not maintain its distance from the ‘between’ is only immanence collapsed in on itself and deprived of meaning.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 5. Nancy’s emphasis.

In gift-exchange there passes a series of acts which refer to and mirror each other, in both temporal directions. Thus the unity of those involved in gift-exchange is simply a function of the “semiotic” or “intentional” interpenetration of various gift-acts.

In response, one need only reiterate the argument offered in the previous chapter. It was argued that the meaningful event of gift—its being offered generously and affirmingly from the side of the giver, and its being received humbly and gratefully on the side of the recipient—has a particular condition of possibility, namely, that the participant express the “difference” of Gift in the middle voice. On this account the “difference” of Gift is its communicability, which is to say, its being the self-same virtuality which would come to expression plurally and “inter-mediate” —i.e., in (and as) the time of co-operation, call-and-response, or non-identical repetition.

One might change tack, and ask *fourth*, whether appealing to the “difference” of mediated Gift requires us to appeal to “communicability” after all. Perhaps the metaphysics of a self-realising individual can be overcome as follows. Suppose some principle or entity *G* comes into expression mediate, in and as an individual’s giving. *G* is “different” from the giver, in the sense that the expressive actuality of *G* is not reducible to the expressive actuality of this individual giver. Here it is not so much that the giver realises and posits itself as an individual giver, but that *G* realises and posits itself through the giver. The “primary subject” of expressive actuality, then, is *G*. But this actuality is realised exclusively, in and through the individual giver in question. *G* does not admit of distinct personal “sites” of mediate expression. *G* is “uni-mediate” rather than “pluri-mediate”; its *physis* (rising into appearance) is “mon-ergetic” rather than syn-ergetic.

Suppose, then, that it is still meaningful to say that *G* is “different” to the giver once the communicability of *G* is denied in this way. This account may be able to accommodate the

idea that *G*'s virtuality (its tendency toward expressive actuality⁸) takes the individual giver along in this tension, such that if the act of *G* occurs, it coincides materially with the act of this individual. Yet presuming that such an accommodation is possible, this dynamic union of mediated principle (*G*) and mediating individual, is, by the definition of *G*, *exclusive* to the giver in question (*A*). *G* is unable to indwell, and express itself, in any mediator besides *A*. Thus *G* is essentially *not* destined for a recipient distinct from the giver—at least not if to “receive” *G* means being able to re-express *G* or “repeat it non-identically”. Hence what *cannot* be accommodated on this account is the notion that *G* is *self-diffusive*.⁹ Here the expression of *G* made by the so-called “giver”, cannot be an “affirmative mirroring” of the other—a showing/giving of *G as* destined for (tending toward, belonging to) another.¹⁰ This is why, in the metaphysic proposed in the previous chapter, communicability is understood to be essential to the “difference” of Gift.

4.3. Teleological Paradox

It would seem, therefore, that it is precisely the *communicability* of a real entity that allows it to be “teleologically paradoxical”—dynamically *for many insofar as it is for itself*. Since the “itself” in this formula is not an individual in a straight-forward sense (for “it” is communicable), the “for many” is not jeopardised. “Many” does not refer to plural entities on the same ontological plane as the “one.” It is precisely the “difference” of communicable Gift which prevents us from saying that Gift stands “besides” individual participants, and that it

⁸ See chapter 6.

⁹ An important neo-Platonic principle: *Bonum est diffusivum sui*. The show made by the self-aggrandizing giver does not count as the “self-diffusion” of Gift here. Nor does it suffice for the expression of *G* to have some effect on another, even if that effect is “beneficial” in some respect. For what is meant by “self-diffusion” here is the communication (both phenomenal and metaphysical at once) of some self-same principle, such that it is now expressible in and through another mediator.

¹⁰ If Gift is communicable, then of course the destination of Gift *as such* is not exclusive to any particular person. However, in each case its belonging with the person is whole and singular, such that, accordingly, each singular expression of Gift is typically directed to just one recipient. The dialectic between the inclusive and exclusive moments of Gift opens a whole new topic for questioning, one that is beyond the scope of this chapter.

counts as another individual. For the same reason, Gift does not stand “aloof” in some inaccessible beyond—on this account Gift is able to be intimately given (perhaps by “grace”) to each of many mediators (and so also *from* each and *between* them). On the other hand, the “itself” still has “real being”, in the sense of having or being a dynamic principle, an expressible virtuality—and this “in itself”, independently of any *particular* indwelling (otherwise “the virtuality of the communicable” could not be retained).¹¹

This is a difficult thought, for it requires one to put aside a certain “nominalistic” prejudice which equates really potent being with *exhaustively individuated* being. It also requires one to affirm the “in itself” of virtuality, while admitting that virtuality is neither fulfilled nor intelligible apart from its (plurally mediated) expression.¹² The virtual/communicable should not be thought of as a complete “something”. Besides (possibly) implying individuality, that would be to think that the actuality of Gift entirely precedes its plurally mediate expression—in which case the belonging-together of Gift and participant (and thus of participants between themselves) would remain unthought. On the other hand—and here is the difficulty—the virtual/communicable is not the *strong* “nothingness” of a “merely logical entity” or “an abstraction”. For, as argued in the previous chapter, if one denies the truth of a dynamic and

¹¹ The first few chapter in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, culminating in “Self-Consciousness”, can be seen as an effort to uncover a peculiar dynamism in which being-for-self and being-for-another are really one, though logically different. As early on as “Perception”, section II of part A. (p. 76), Hegel is already proposing such “paradoxical” thoughts as the following: “[T]he object is in one and the same respect the opposite of itself; it is for itself, so far as it is for another, and it is for another, so far as it is for itself.” However, the ethical and teleological/metaphysical senses of “being-for”, which are in play in my text above, are in Hegel tightly interwoven with—perhaps even grounded in—another “phenomenological” sense of “being-for”. This is clearest in the section on self-consciousness (see §3.2.3. above). To be “for” another, in this sense, is to be “apparent” to and recognized by another; it is to “register” in another’s consciousness. “Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.” (111). Cf. Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 133-36. In my text, I am not drawing on this third sense precisely, though I am certainly attending to the phenomenality of gift-expression. Nor should one identify my account of the “for itself” of a universal with Hegel’s in his Preface to the *Phenomenology*, §17-25—at least not without certain qualifications. My “teleology of the communicable” was formed partly whilst grappling with the philosophical problems laid out in Pierre Rousselot, *The Problem of Love in the Middle Ages: A Historical Contribution*, trans. Alan Vincelette (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2001) and in Thomas M. Osborne, Jr., *Love of God and Love of Self in Thirteenth-Century Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005). From another perspective, it is an attempt to accommodate, teleologically, the “axiological” dimension of von Hildebrand. See Dietrich von Hildebrand, *The Nature of Love*, trans. John F. Crosby with John Henry Crosby (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009); John F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

¹² For Aristotle, actuality is primary in knowledge and in finality. *Metaphysica*, Θ.8, 1049^b14-16.

communicable Principle from which singular expressions arise and to which they return—and surely, this dynamic “from and for itself” could not be a property of an inert abstraction—one is left with sheer pluralism, in which each individual expresses and serves itself alone.

More precisely, unless one posits a communicable *virtus* and Good, it seems one is left with a sheer pluralism in which, *at best*, each individual expresses and serves its *sheerly singular self* and is *also* called to serve the *sheerly singular Other*. “Ethical” transcendence is accommodated but is thought to be oriented toward the *atomic* good of the Other.¹³ Here the focus of one’s ethical intentionality is not the good of a singular other *where this is tied up intimately and “iconically” with the plurally manifest Same/Good*. Rather this focus is simply, and immediately, the good of a singular Other, as if this could occur in the “raw”. The Good is pluralised *and not also united*, as if one had to choose between the One and the Many (whereas on this vision the One and the Many belong together insofar as they mediate each other). The result is what John Milbank calls an “ethics of self-sacrifice”, which by definition is unable to harmonise the good of the self with that of the other.¹⁴ The problematic

¹³ It is tempting to associate this with the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979). However, the later sections on fecundity and paternity suggest that Lévinas does not think singularity in such atomic terms after all—at least not unequivocally.

¹⁴ My main objection to Mark Maniopoulos, *If Creation is a Gift* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009) is therefore as follows. In brief, it is not necessary to sustain an irreducibly “aporetic” approach to gift in order to do justice to its moments of reciprocity *and* to its moments of unilateral gratuity/expenditure—not if one rises philosophically to the level of communicable Gift, which is *for itself insofar as it is for many*. If it appears that *aporia* is essential to the gift, and to its philosophical concept and expression, that is only because one has not, after all, transcended the perspective of the atomic individual in favour of the mediated universal or plurally expressible. Likewise, it unnecessary to say that for gift to occur “[t]here must be chance, encounter, the involuntary, even unconsciousness or disorder, and there must be intentional freedom, and these two conditions must—miraculously, graciously—agree with each other.” Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 123. Hegel would say that *aporia* is a function of *Verstand* and/or *Vernunft*, the stages of thought that precede speculative reason. The latter “apprehends the unity of terms (propositions) in their opposition—the affirmative, which is involved in their disintegration and in their transition.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, trans. W. Wallace with introduction by A.V. Miller (Oxford, Clarendon, 1975), §82 (see also §§80-81). Cf. Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 242-44.

nature of this ethic was the subject of the second chapter.¹⁵

4.4. The Question of Indwelling

On this account, then, the individual is borne outwards, toward another (or others), by the indwelling of self-diffusing, plurally expressible Gift. Of course such appeal to “self-diffusion”, “plural expression”, “communicable *virtus*”, “excess” and “difference” relies on the notion of “indwelling”. The latter was understood in terms of what might be called “inclusive expressive coincidence”. *Expressive coincidence*: Each (singular) expression of Gift coincides with an expression made in and by and from an individual participant (giver and/or recipient). This is not to collapse the expression of the communicable into some self-expression of an atomic individual; the use of “coincidence” must not be misunderstood, in terms of being “coterminous” (the extension of one coinciding with the extension of the other). Rather, it is to say that the expression of the excessive communicable, occurs *as* the expression of this or that individual *by virtue* (*virtus*) of the communicable, *where conversely*, the individual’s expression is really an occurrence of the communicable. In short, the expression of Gift is mediated by individual persons. *Inclusive expressive coincidence*: Yet this coincidence, or dynamic union, is not exclusive to any particular giver. The expression of

¹⁵ One might question the need to appeal to teleology at all. My response to this objection is basically the same as Milbank’s in *BR*, although I emphasise the teleology of the *communicable*. “But if, rather, we must discriminate amongst invasions, then violence is only violence when it ruins an essence (how something should be) or diverts from a goal (how something should develop) (27). “Privation theory ... points out that the ‘good’ will to freedom in its unteleological neutrality is bound to be as evil as it is good. Hence the positive assertion of private autonomy is judged to be *just as* evil as its evidently evil and perverse enjoyment of heteronomous interferences ... Such autonomy is exposed by privation theory as deprivation of our participation in being as gift: in this way privation theory attacks as evil not just exterior and visible destruction, but also interior and invisible self-assertion. The latter is here diagnosed *as also* evil; but this means as also secretly violent: a violence against Being, an attempted and illusory violence against God” (27). “[W]hile we must accept and embrace the revisability of the given world, this dynamism need not and should not refuse notions of nature and essence, not as what is exhaustively given, but as what may eventually be disclosed as valuable abiding gift with and through time, rather than despite it. Certain transformations and graftings may develop and unfold more of a partially pre-given and desirable identity, certain others the reverse” (201). “[T]o judge concerning a transformation, to decide as to whether, in this particular instance of *techne*, there is also an instance of art which elevates and further reveals *natura*, is entirely a matter of discernment, according to no pre-written rules, precisely because we have faith that we do live in a Creation where discernment is possible. In this sense, the transgression of boundaries is not antinomic, because it is rather the ceaseless extension of the Book of the Law in real positive enactments. It is the constant retracing of the real eternal boundaries which we but partially intuit. The contesting of the postmodern lies precisely in this trust in discernment and the discrimination amongst resting places” (202).

Gift is *plurally mediated*. Indeed, it is precisely this non-coincidence of participant and Gift that is expressed each time, differently. Thus the manifestation of Gift *as* plurally mediable, is plurally mediated. The nature of “indwelling” and “expressive coincidence” calls for more thought, however, and is the subject of further inquiry in chapters 5 and 6.¹⁶

4.5. Two Aspects of Unity in Gift-Exchange

However, if the mediation of communicable Gift is a *necessary* condition for the event of the gift, and for the emergence of society in gift-exchange, it may not be a *sufficient* condition. To say (a) that distinct participants in Gift are each empowered to bring the Same into expression, by virtue of the plural indwelling and mediation of Gift, is not yet to say (b) that these participants, by giving-and-receiving, continually open for each other a space in which to offer different expressions of Gift through time. With (a) the plural indwelling of the communicable Same is affirmed. But it is only with (b) that the plural possession of expressible Gift, or better, the plural *reception* of Gift, is recognised in its *reciprocal* or *dialogically playful* form. Again, point (a) affirms that the dynamic union of expressible Gift and a particular mediating participant, is not an exclusive union. It says, in short, that Gift is “different” or communicable. But with point (b) a further step is taken. The dynamic union of Gift and participant(s) is now “temporalised”—understood to involve the continual reception of Gift—and this temporalisation is itself “spatialised”—understood to occur in the form of interpersonal reciprocity. Thus to participate in Gift is to recognise and express the interdependence of participating in Gift, and in this way to open the way again for the other to participate in Gift according to this same emerging truth—the truth of sharing, the truth of belonging in the “threefold” of self-other-Gift.

¹⁶ See especially the remarks on “act-identity” in §6.8.1.

The purpose of the first half of the previous chapter (§3.2.) was to trace the dialogical form of gift-exchange, or the “spatialisation” of the temporality of gift. As just explained, one might inquire further into the nature of the interdependence of our participation in Gift (e.g., how exactly does one expression of Gift make possible and call for another expression of the Same?). However, the specific question that was taken up in §3.3. pertained to the manner in which the “Sameness” of Gift is to be thought. It was argued that Sameness should be read “strongly” in terms of the “virtuality of the communicable” (rather than weakly in terms of an impotent “type” with a merely intentional existence), following the suggestion that the primary Subject at work in the incipient *society* of gift-exchange, is nomadic. No attempt was made to give an adequate account of the way in which one act of gift-exchange follows another intentionally and meaningfully (not just factually).

There are difficulties associated with this latter theme. How best to think the virtuality of the recipient *qua* recipient, the capacity to respond to the giver gratefully? By this is meant not a native capacity, like the innate ability to speak, but a concrete opportunity to answer, in response to a singular act of generosity of a particular person (however much this requires certain innate capacities as well as developed abilities). What does it mean to act *after* and *in response to* another act? Surely, it is not enough to appeal to a communicable *virtus*, let alone an incommunicable one (to say this does *not* threaten the argument for the *necessity* of communicable Gift, however). The opportunity to respond is not an endemic faculty; it is more like a space opened in the wake of a prior act.

One might develop this notion phenomenologically, as follows. The act to which one responds has already occurred, yet in the silence its having-occurred resonates even now, calling for a response at some stage, in some way. Perhaps the capacity/opportunity to respond is just this “after-effect” (or memory?) of a prior act. If it is true that (a) the communicability of Gift is necessarily at work between persons-in-relation, it is also true that

(b) one's capacity to mediate express Gift does not endure internally and immutably, but eventuates as a series of responsive openings or opportunities. This suggests that each expression of Gift opens the space for—or rather, *is* the opening for—new expressions of Gift (which are themselves openings for further expressions, and so on *ad infinitum*). This would mean that each expression made by some giver makes possible a new moment of dynamic union between recipient and Gift, where this moment of union, and any ensuing expression, is characterised by its context in time and space. It was said above that to participate in Gift is to let happen the Event of differentiation which is no less an Event of gathering-together. What calls for further thought is the *non-identical repetition* of this Event between participants in Gift—the way in which the expressive differentiation (and gathering) of Gift and participant at *one* moment, essentially takes over from a *previous* moment of differentiation and also calls for a *further* moment, and even promises an open future of such ongoing differentiation (and gathering).¹⁷ One suggestion worth building on was made at the end of the previous chapter.¹⁸

4.6. The Spirit of the Gift

What also needs more exploration is the relation between the material gift and communicable “Gift”. The distinction between the two was operative in the previous chapter. The difference between the gift-object (in the case that there *is* one, for in the act of giving love, time or

¹⁷ And one might ask *also*: Does the possibility of repeating this Event differently and indefinitely, make Gift the same as the Good? Is Gift divine?

¹⁸ To indulge in self-quotation: The excess of Gift, over and between giver *and* recipient, is only available to the recipient *qua* recipient—only able to be manifest again, as the recipient lets herself be exceeded by Gift (and simultaneously repeats its excess over the giver)—insofar as it manifestly exceeds the giver (and recipient) *with the giver's consent*. The excess of Gift is not presented to the recipient directly, purely, and immediately, but only *in and with the giver's conceding* to excessive Gift, via the presentation of the gift.

attention, no object need be transferred) and the “spirit”¹⁹ of the gift seems necessary.

According to Derrida,

[t]here would be, *on the one hand*, the gift that gives something determinate (a given, a present in whatever form it may be, personal or im-personal thing, ‘natural’ or symbolic thing, thing or sign, nondiscursive or discursive sign, and so forth) and, *on the other hand*, the gift that gives not a given but the *condition* of a present given in general, that gives therefore the element of the given in general.²⁰

Is communicable Gift, then, the meaningful “element” of the given-thing, whereby the latter “is” a *gift*? There does not seem to be any problem with the idea that the Same spirit animates the giver’s act of giving and also gives the gift its gift-meaning.²¹ For it can be said that, if an act of giving is animated by Gift, then it also endows the gift with the radiance of Gift—such that the condition of accepting the gift as such, is participation in the Same Gift. On this account, the material gift manifests Gift—or more precisely, it manifests *the giver’s enactment* of Gift—and therefore is the medium for the communication and repetition (re-expression) of Gift.²²

¹⁹ Cf. Marshall Sahlines, “The Spirit of the Gift” in Alan D. Schrift (ed.), *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1997), 70-99. Also relevant in the same volume is Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Selections from *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*”, 45-69. Lévi-Strauss claims, against Mauss, that it is not necessary to posit some mysterious “spirit” or *hau* that animates the gift, in order to explain the structural unity of giving-and-receiving and of gift-and-countergift. If Mauss were true to his holistic anthropological method, there would be no need to posit *hau* to join the poles of giving and counter-giving together *post hoc* (see the article by Sahlines for other objections to Mauss’s use of *hau* and to his interpretation of Maori practice and folklore). However, this objection assumes that spirit/*hau* would *only* be required to unite atomistically conceived elements *post hoc*, whereas it is arguable that the existence of something like spirit/*hau* (in this work, Gift) is the condition for a synergetic agency—gift-exchange conceived in *non*-atomistic terms. Hence, Mauss’s use of *hau* may well be the only way (or at least, one *valid* way) of *avoiding* atomism, and this *in accordance with* his revolutionary anthropological holism, after all. Note that the ontology of Gift proposed in this chapter promises to give, perhaps even beyond Mauss, an account of the “necessity” of giving at all. The “teleology” of Gift is enacted by plural expression, in the form of an incipient “being-with” (see §3.2.5. above).

²⁰ “It is thus, for example, that ‘to give time’ is not to give a given present but the condition of presence of any present in general To give time, the day, or life is to give nothing, nothing determinate, even if it is to give the giving of any possible giving, even if it gives the condition of giving”. Derrida, *Given Time*, 54. Derrida’s emphasis.

²¹ “... in the semantics of the word ‘gift’ it seems implied that the donating agency freely has the intention to give, that it is animated by a wanting-to-give and first of all by a *wanting-to-say, the intention-to-give to the gift its meaning of gift*.” Derrida, *Given Time*, 123. My emphasis.

²² This account might even be adapted and generalised to include facial expressions and bodily gestures which manifest and communicate Gift, but never as a transferred gift/thing.

Yet to claim that the gift-object itself has, *ontically speaking*, a plurally expressible *virtus*—a life or power able to be participated in, plurally—seems problematic:

Does this [Maussian] property [“which forces the gift to circulate, to be given and returned”] exist objectively, like a physical property of the exchanged goods? Obviously not. That would in any case be impossible, since the goods in question are not only physical objects, but also dignities, responsibilities, privileges ...²³

The gift of perfume, taken as a material *thing* with a certain *physical* nature, has the propensity to evaporate and create a certain aroma, *not* to signify the giver and bring lover and beloved together. On the other hand, between the former effects, and the latter effects which are of a different order, there is, phenomenologically speaking, a certain “fitting” unity. Again, one should not confuse the ontic and the semiotic—even if, phenomenologically, the two are intertwined, such that meaning gains “objectivity”, and equally, things carry “subjectivity”:

A gift, in order to be a gift, must be a thing and no mere sign; yet it must also exceed this thingness in terms of meaning if it is to convey to the recipient the message of generosity, and therefore it must be a thing whose adoption as a sign exceeds in turn its mere thingness.²⁴

Hence it would be problematic to read Milbank’s “non-identical repetition of gift” in terms of the plural “expression” or “mediation” or “enactment” of the very same gift-*object*. It is obvious that the “circulation of gift” envisaged by Milbank is not the circulation (and self-propulsion) of the same material *thing*. If the “chains of affinity” formed between persons

²³ Claude Lévi-Strauss, “Selections from *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*”, 55. I depart from Lévi-Strauss by denying that physical or “ontic” properties exhaust the field of the “objective”—as if the only alternative to the above it to say that it is merely *human subjectivity* that “forces” gifts to circulate. To be sure, on my account the “obedience” of individuals to the “givability” of Gift is necessary for the plural mediation of Gift.

²⁴ Milbank, “Paul Against Biopolitics” in John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 21-73, here 39. “As anthropologists have for a long time told us, so-called primitive societies do not make our divisions between public contract and private gift, nor between the free active subject and the inert object. Hence for these societies, a thing exchanged is not a commodity, but a gift; and it is not *alienated* from the giver but expresses his personality, so that the giver is *in* the gift, he *goes with* the gift. Precisely for this reason, a return on the gift is always due to the giver, unlike our modern ‘free gift.’” *BR*, 167, Milbank’s emphasis. See also Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love” in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 253-317 esp. 305-7.

and between communities are the work of gift-exchange, this is not *necessarily* a function of the circulation of the one fetishised object. In fact, that which is repeated could not even be some individual's singular *act* (not: Act) of gift-giving.

4.7. Local and General Horizons of Gift

Perhaps the weakest aspect of the ontology of Gift offered above is the absence of any account of the relation between (i) "Gift" taken as the principle of unity between two particular persons involved in gift-exchange, such that "Gift" is *not* open for participation by others (in fact, though not necessarily in principle), and (ii) "Gift" taken as a universal more directly [Gift_U] where this universal is instantiated in each case of (i).²⁵ Does this account require that Gift_U is *itself* a communicable virtuality? Or does it allow that Gift_U is the "same" in a weaker, "generic" sense (it is merely a "being of reason")? If the former path is taken, what is the relation between Gift_L ("local" Gift) and Gift_U? If, as argued above, the act of generosity has as its condition the expression of the *excess* of Gift, must this excess exceed also the horizon of this particular gift-exchange, in which case it is possibly a manifestation of Gift_U? Or is it enough that Gift be shown as exceeding the individual giver—as Gift_L? Another question: is the plurally expressed love that animates the gift-exchange between (say) Tom and his wife Sally, a singular manifestation of the Same Gift which is *also* manifest between Maria and her son, Daniel (this example involves numerical difference *and* qualitative difference)?

The problem, it seems, with *collapsing* Gift_L into Gift_U, such that each expression of gift signifies only the *universal* belonging of Gift_U—the *unrestrictedly plural* expressibility of the

²⁵ Likewise, Milbank's applies the "non-identical repetition" of gift to individuals, dyads, societies and traditions without giving attention to this disparity philosophically. There is at least *one* sense in which the same transferral of the *same* gift-object might be repeated non-identically: the giver's offering of the gift is mirrored and completed by its grateful reception. But to offer *another* gift, either back to the first giver, or forward to another recipient, must involve some *other* mode of non-identical repetition, if any.

Same_U—is that all local affinity and intimacy would thereby be cancelled. A dyad, for example, would not even be *relatively* complete as a horizon of gift-exchange, whereas the phenomena of friendship, coupling and marriage strongly suggest otherwise. But inversely, collapsing Gift_U into Gift_L would mean the following: each gift-expression made by each member of some dyad or society would signify (falsely) the *absolute* completeness of this dyad or society.²⁶ These two points together suggest that Gift_U comes to expression as a virtuality, just as Gift_L does. Parsimony would dictate that these are simply different aspects or modes of expression of the Same, rather than two real entities. Plural entities also poses the problem of how to synthesise the expressions of one with that of the other.

Perhaps the expression of Gift should be thought in terms of the “subsidiarity” of local dyads and societies, as follows.²⁷ One might propose an analogous relationship between (a) the relation between the individual and the dyad or society and (b) the relation between a dyad or society and all possible societies and persons (and even things). Concerning (a): while (i) each individual’s expression of Gift signifies the *excess* of Gift and therefore the belonging of Gift to *other* member(s) of a society of gift-exchange, (ii) the *plurality* of this belonging is nothing without the *singular* belonging of Gift *in each case*. For Gift to actively belong to a dyad or society is for it *to pass between* each of its participants, from one “relay station” or site of belonging to another, and so on.²⁸ Concerning (b): while (i) each society’s expression of Gift in relation to what is beyond itself, signifies the Gift’s exceeding this society (as *well* as its exceeding the individual in favour of the society), and therefore its belonging *not just to*

²⁶ See §2.7. above.

²⁷ In *BR*, chapters 9 and 10, Milbank invokes the subsidiary. Ultimately, he reconciles the local and the general *ecclesialogically*: “...the Church fuses *oikos* and *polis*” (209).

²⁸ “The only way ... to escape restricting terrain, is to refuse even the opposition of territory and escape. If there is any human nature, perhaps it resides in the desire to be at once at home and abroad. But this is only possible where one admits the lure of supernatural transcendence. For then immanent dynamism and immanent stasis are both outplayed, then the flux is not itself an immanent God, the pure space of pure movement, but consists rather in the *relay stations* themselves, the open but identifiable essences along its course. Then ... we are not postmodern nomads, but ecclesial pilgrims.” *BR*, 210. My emphasis.

this society, (ii) this does not negate the fact that this society is still in some sense *a* peculiar horizon for the plural expression of Gift. Just as (a) Gift actively transcends each individual toward a local dyad or society, but without dissolving the individuals who must *mediate* the dyad or society (for this unity is *differentiated*, horizontally and hierarchically), likewise (b) Gift actively transcends (“leaps over and between”) many dyads and societies in favour of (in Milbank’s words) universal *Peace*, and this without dissolving the local unities which are “breached”. This gives us (at minimum) a *three-levelled* hierarchy: universal, “subsidiary,” and individual. (In fact the “meso”-level also admits of further, inward differentiation: e.g., the traditional family includes a married couple).

4.8. Comparison with Milbank

4.8.1. Ahistoricism

Another weakness of the account of gift offered here is its ahistorical nature; this is a weakness of Milbank’s account also. However, on both accounts there is at least a response to Marcel Mauss’s concrete anthropology of gift-exchange.²⁹ Yet Milbank’s *theological* account of gift is, in principle, able to avoid ahistoricism *in a way that this philosophical work cannot*. In *Being Reconciled* (2003) Milbank projects that “future writings will concern the relation of gift to being and to God, *and its ethnographic and historical instances*.”³⁰ Still, *BR* does not approach the question of gift in a logical void but from our general situation of

²⁹ Mauss, *The Gift*.

³⁰ *BR*, xi. My emphasis. The “relation to being and to God” has since been addressed by Milbank in (primarily) “The Gift and the Mirror”; “The Shares of Being or Gift, Relation and Participation: an Essay on the Metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou.” Centre of Theology and Philosophy (2006), accessible at www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php#milbank and *The Suspended Middle*. However, to date, the “historical and ethnographic instances” remain largely unexplored. One exception is “The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority”, *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004) 212-38.

fallenness, as narrated theologically, by Christianity.³¹ It is affirmed that our understanding of Being (and therefore gift) must be revised in light of the Christ-event:

[W]hile there is indeed no Hegelian necessity for fault if we are to reach the highest human goal, and no reason too blithely to celebrate fault ... all the same a narrative course of alienation and restoration *does* appear to occasion an ontological revision ... This is not indeed, as for Hegel, an ontological revision for God, but it is still an ontological revision for the Creation in relation to God ...³²

To develop the idea of the “virtuality of communicable” in a Christological light would require one to undertake an explicitly theological work. In any case, the question of the relation between history and our thinking of Being is beyond the scope of this chapter (and indeed, this thesis).³³

4.8.2. *Metaphysics of Sameness*

Milbank does not support his vision of gift-exchange—with its themes of non-identical repetition, reciprocal unity, and analogical blending of differences—with *a sustained metaphysical questioning of Sameness*. To be sure, many of Milbank’s statements on gift-exchange, especially its characterisation as “non-identical repetition” and “asymmetrical reciprocity”, might appear to *imply* the existence of a self-same circulating *virtus*, a “nomadic” Agent. The vision offered here *complements* or perhaps *deepens* Milbank’s vision by beginning from the side of the “communicable”, and arguing that the expression of Gift *as* excessive, in and through material gifts, is the condition of (i) true generosity, and therefore

³¹ “[T]o start with the restoration of the gift is to stress our fallen condition, and the lack of ease of escape from this ...” *BR*, xii. “[S]ince we inhabit a broken world, this is to follow the *ordo intelligendi* [order of knowledge] rather than the *ordo essendi* [order of reality]...” (xi).

³² *BR*, 70-71. Milbank’s emphasis. Regarding this “cautious Hegelian Thomism”, Milbank cites Michel Corbin, *L’Inoui de Dieu: Six Etudes Christologiques* (Paris: Desclé de Brouwer, 1979).

³³ See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed., translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (Continuum: London and New York, 2004).

of (ii) social unity in gift-exchange. Novel insight into the nature of generosity, and also interpersonal unity, is thus afforded.

4.8.3. *Reciprocity*

At this point, a distinct advantage of the ontology of the *communicable* comes to the fore. As argued in the previous chapter, tracing the communication and circulation of “Gift” preserves the recognition and exchange of gifts from the threat of a merely *individual* self-return. Hence the appearance and vision of gift do not become, aporetically, the contradiction of gift. In fact, gratitude and counter-gift can even be seen as something *called for* by the gift—in certain circumstances, at the very least. So on *one hand*, the ontology of Gift easily *accommodates* Milbank’s three-fold association of gift, exchange and society. However, this ontology is *not* forced to say that any particular movement of gift (and Gift) in time is ordered toward reciprocity between giver and recipient (where these roles are subject to reversal). While the plural expression of Gift may well take a reciprocal form in many cases, to concede to the plural mediation of Gift and release a gift forward, need not require the possibility, nor even the intention, of forming meaningful society with the recipient. That is, only in *some* cases does being true to the excess of Gift entail having and expressing *intentio unionis* in some form. To see that the Good belongs to another—that the other is a fitting destination and expressive “site” of Gift, where the other is seen in more abstract terms (as a human person) or in more concrete terms (as a unique character with special “gifts”) or perhaps even both at once—to see this and be generously true to this vision, does not in every case require the invitation to interpersonal reciprocity, nor even the *desire* for such. In fact, in many cases the right thing to do one is to put aside or temper this desire when it is present. So if one speaks of “society” here it is only in a more general sense, one which includes such virtues as justice, respect, solidarity, charity and civility. None of these necessarily demands

the intimacy of an ongoing relationship—even if their occurrence depends ultimately on the experience of intimacy somewhere else (e.g., in the family).³⁴

4.9. Conclusion

On this account of communicable Gift, understood as the ground of gift-exchange, Gift is “for many insofar as it is for itself”. That is, it tends toward its own expressive act just by circulating between the plural mediators through whom this expressive event comes to pass. Thus it is arguable that thinking gift and/or Gift as “destined” for the recipient does *not* entail that gift/Gift serves an external *telos* or *ratio*, against its gratuity. For Gift realises its own immanent teleology by realising its destiny as something to be plurally mediated. This also means that the plural expression of Gift releases the freedom of its individual participants while bringing these participants into relation. However, if the notion of the communicable Same is necessary to account for the event of interpersonal unity, it is not sufficient—one must also attend to the dynamics of call-and-response. Other important topics of inquiry here include the relation between the “matter” and “spirit” of the gift, and between local and general horizons of gift-exchange. In contrast with Milbank’s account of gift-exchange, the proposed ontology pays due attention the metaphysics of Sameness. And while it promises to accommodate the possibility and indeed the fittingness of reciprocity in gift-exchange, it does not claim that the event of Gift is in every case a movement toward reciprocity.

This completes the critique and development of Milbank’s understanding of “gift”. The remaining chapters focus on the related theme of “participation”. It has been proposed that the plural possession and expression of the Same is what makes for generous transcendence toward the other and genuine unity in gift-exchange. In the next chapter, it will shown that

³⁴ Cf. Christopher Cordner, “Liking, Loving and Respecting Others” in his *Ethical Encounter: The Depth of Moral Meaning* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001). Note too that the first chapter, “Aristotelian Virtue and Beyond” is relevant in the overcoming of a subtly self-centred virtue ethic (giving for the sake of *being known as generous* to oneself and others).

Milbank's understanding of the creature's participation in divine implies the thought of plural possession also. In this manner, the first stage of the overall argument—the proposal of the communicable as the condition for gift *and* participation—will be complete. At the same time, the second stage of the argument is initiated. The propriological distinction will be offered in order to begin to make sense of the plural possession that is key to Milbank's account of participation.

5. Two Senses of “Proper”

5.1. Introduction

This chapter attends critically to Milbank’s understanding of participation, and introduces a distinction between two senses of “proper”, the dynamical and the ontic-metaphysical. This represents the beginning of the second stage of the overall argument of the thesis. While the focus of this chapter is participation, the value of the propriological distinction made here is its power to account for the possibility of plural possession as such—not just the *processio* or infusion which for Milbank characterises the creature’s *methexis* in divine being (as shown below), but also the circulation of Gift as narrated in the previous two chapters. Hence the full significance of the propriological distinction is not restricted to the way it is applied in this chapter.

First, in response to James K.A. Smith’s objection, that a participatory ontology does not give created beings their *own* being and agency, it is proposed that distinguishing two senses of “proper” allows one to say that God gives *himself* to creatures as their (dynamically) proper origin of act or expression. *Second*, it is explained how this “propriological” distinction opens up a “self-diffusive” view of the transcendence and immanence of God. On this view, the creature is given *itself* insofar as it is given *God* as empowering gift; the recipient-gift is grounded or enfolded in the Giver-gift. This contrasts with a “creational” ontology, for which the creature is simply given itself by the efficient causation of God, even if this efficient cause is taken to be “ongoing” rather than simply “initiating”. *Third*, it is argued that combining the “radical dependence” of the creature on God-as-efficient cause, with the idea that the finite perfections of creatures “take part” in the infinite plenitude of divine Being in a “formally comparative” sense, does not yet make for a self-diffusive configuration of “participation”. Hence the distinguishing features of Milbank’s

understanding and use of “participation”, remain obscure as long as one appeals only to the notion of “radical dependence” thought in exemplary and efficient causal terms. For this reason, it is misleading to associate Milbank’s use of “participation” with that of Aquinas.

5.2. Responding to James K.A. Smith’s “Creational Ontology”

In light of recent philosophies of pure immanence, which consciously reject Platonic *methexis*, one might be tempted to connect the rejection of “participation” with the rejection of transcendence (God, the Good).¹ However, the refusal of “participation” is not in every case a refusal of a traditional theological understanding of the goodness of creation. For one might argue, as does James K.A. Smith, that thinking created beings as Leibniz does—as dynamically charged (“front-loaded”²) centres from which their expressions independently unfold—affords the most value to creation and in turn gives the most glory to the Creator.

Smith asks if perhaps “the most radical affirmation of transcendence is accomplished in the affirmation of immanence?” He suggests that one powerful affirmation of immanence is found in the metaphysics of Leibniz, as rediscovered by Gilles Deleuze. “And in that case, would not Deleuze be an important ally in the development of a creational ontology?”³ Smith therefore puts Deleuze to work—or more precisely, he puts Deleuze-reading-Leibniz to work—in his non-participatory, non-Platonic affirmation of the goodness of creation. In the process, of course, he avoids the atheistic gestures of the Frenchman, emphasising instead the theism of Leibniz.⁴

¹ For a short essay by Deleuze on “immanence”, see Gilles Deleuze, “Immanence: A Life” in *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life*, trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books: 2001), 25-33.

² See the quoted passage at note 6 below.

³ James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Toward a Post-Secular Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 205. Henceforth, *IRO*.

⁴ For Smith, it is important that Leibniz concedes that the substance is *dependent, as a created being, on God*, even though all of its actions arise from its own depths. *IRO*, 212-215, esp. 212n92.

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What Deleuze sees Leibniz doing is overturning Platonism ... by means of subverting dualism (though there certainly remain dualities in Leibniz) ... [W]hat Deleuze finds in Leibniz is a certain *reenchantment of the material whereby nature is invested with a dynamism and a plenitude*.⁵

In his constructive proposal, Leibniz argues forcefully for the sufficiency of nature *as created*. Rather than lacking something, and thus needing perpetual divine intervention, creation is front-loaded, so to speak, with all that it requires to function.⁶

Smith sees this understanding of the dynamic endowment of creatures, as different to the ontology of Radical Orthodoxy (he explicitly includes Catherine Pickstock, Graham Ward and John Milbank; the following response focuses on the latter). He agrees that it is necessary to affirm the *integrity* of creation, and that such integrity is compatible with a traditionally theological worldview, since it does not imply that the world is completely *autonomous* or independent from God (as Deleuze does). His critical point is that the theo-ontology of Radical Orthodoxy in fact “*negate[s]* the integrity of a good creation” insofar as this ontology “suspends the material” in God, or in other words, takes over the Platonic notion of *methexis*.⁷ (“Suspending the Material” is the title of the editors’ introduction to *Radical Orthodoxy*,⁸ and refers to the claim that all domains of human life, e.g. culture, art, love, politics, economics and language, have their being by participating in the infinite. On this view, material things and events have depth and beauty and value just because they share in and bear the radiance of the divine, in different ways).

⁵ *IRO*, 209. My emphasis.

⁶ *IRO*, 214. My emphasis.

⁷ *IRO*, 204. Emphasis mine. For the history of this term, see David C. Schindler, “What’s the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context” in *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3.1 (2005), 1-27. Also useful are Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), and William Norris Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 89-101.

⁸ John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Wards (eds.), *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Smith’s argument can be analysed as follows. First, if an entity were not dynamically endowed (in possession of some force or potential by which it acts) it would not have (i) genuine being, and so would not be (ii) intrinsically good. Thus, along with (i) the link between power and being, (ii) Smith repeats the traditional link between being and goodness.⁹ Second, it is claimed that the participatory suspension of creatures in God is incompatible with their real dynamic endowment by God. If creatures have their being only by “participation”, they could not possibly be dynamically endowed. The two claims together lead to the conclusion: a participatory ontology effectively denies the intrinsic goodness of creation. Of course Smith is theologically committed to the intrinsic goodness of creation (as are Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy in general, but they take a different approach in upholding this principle). He therefore offers Leibnizian “integrity” as an alternative to Platonic *methexis* (as that is repeated by the Radically Orthodox “suspension of the material”). “It is precisely Leibniz’s desire to do justice to the glory of the Creator that leads him to so emphasise the self-sufficiency or integrity of creation as a structure of immanence.”¹⁰

Smith understands the following declarations of the participatory framework, as implying a problematic absence of any inner dynamism in creatures (of course this result is not *intended*, and Smith does not claim this). He quotes Graham Ward (the third editor of *RONT*, alongside Milbank and Pickstock), who proposes that things “are continually in a state of being gifted to us, animated for us, by God himself”¹¹ such that the potential of each thing abides “in and

⁹ See Scott MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness: The Concept of the Good in Metaphysics and Philosophical Theology* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001). In this volume see esp. Scott MacDonald, “The Metaphysics of Goodness and the Doctrine of the Transcendentals”, 31-55; Jan A. Aersten, “Good as Transcendental and the Transcendence of the Good”, 56-73; Ralph McInerney, “Saint Thomas on *De hebdomadibus*”, 74-97.

¹⁰ *IRO*, 216.

¹¹ Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 89.

around” it.¹² (What might Ward mean by “in” here? The meaning of “in” is precisely what is at stake in Smith’s critique, and also in this response.) The comment of Smith’s that follows these citations is telling:

So there is a sense in which the being of things seems to be *extrinsic to them rather than inhering in them*. As a result, [Radical Orthodoxy’s] participatory ontology can slide toward an occasionalism that requires the incessant activity of the Creator to uphold what would seem to be a deficient creation—a tendency to emphasize the creature’s participation in the divine to the extent that it seems the divine does everything.¹³

To intervene, however, the pertinent question is not exactly whether “the divine does everything”, but whether the creature’s activity can be attributed to the creature truthfully. For the authors to whom Smith is responding, the creature’s real agency is compatible with—nay, made possible by—the fact that God is at work in all activity (such that God is more than a deistically removed first cause). Hence, if Smith’s comment is to reach its target, it should rather say that “emphasizing participation makes it seem that *the creature does nothing*.” (This problematic doing-nothing, one should note, is different to the “doing-nothing” of the saint or mystic who says, “I do not love others, it is God who loves”, while deeply empathising with others and actively caring for them. Such nothingness is completely in line with the notion of actively receptive expression of God, in the “middle voice”, and does not imply the problematic inertness of “occasionalism”.)

It should also be noted that Smith makes his case against Radical Orthodoxy by questioning “the being of things” and then posing a mutually exclusive opposition between extrinsic (“extrinsic to them”) and intrinsic (“inhering in them”). If the *being* of things is in question, then of course one is forced to side with “intrinsic” as against “extrinsic”. But is this the only

¹² *IRO*, 204, citing Ward, *Cities of God*, 88. This is not an entirely useful citation for Smith, since “potential” in Leibniz might still be said to be “in and around” body or matter.

¹³ *IRO*, 204. My emphasis.

way of presenting the situation? Is it perhaps unfair for Smith to situate the disagreement between Milbank/Radical Orthodoxy and himself on *this* plane—intrinsic being as “monadic integrity” versus the extrinsic being of “participation”? What if one were to question instead an *indwelling principle on account of which things have their power and being*? While being, taken concretely as the being of this particular subject, does not lend itself to being thought as something *other* to its subject even as it is *proper* to that subject, an indwelling principle just might—in which case the opposition between extrinsic and intrinsic would be unhelpful and misleading.¹⁴ This “crack” in Smith’s analysis is as yet barely visible, but can indeed be pried open, as follows.

5.2.1. Two Readings of Dynamical Endowment

If it is agreed that a theo-ontology for which the creature effectively *does nothing* is highly problematic, then the notion that creatures are “dynamically endowed” with an expressible potential whereby they act, is certainly important. It is at this point that the crucial divergence appears between Smith on one hand, and Milbank (and Radical Orthodoxy in general) on the other. Smith evidently reduces dynamic endowment, to the endowment of the creature with a force or potential which is *ontically proper* to the creature. This explains his attraction to the monadology of Leibniz:

The basic units that Leibniz describes as monads are composed of force and matter and cannot be separated from matter. In fact, for Leibniz, the immaterial aspect of the monad is identified with force, and this force “is itself an inherent law imprinted by divine decree” on materiality. In this sense, what is compressed or folded into the monad is simply order that inheres in matter.¹⁵

¹⁴ See §6.4. below.

¹⁵ *IRO*, 216. Smith cites Leibniz, *Nature Itself*, §11; *New System*, §§3, 12; *Reflections on the Advancement of True Metaphysics and Particularly on the Nature of Substance Explained by Force*, §4. These texts are included in G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Texts*, ed. R.S. Woodhouse and Richard Franks (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1998).

Smith takes it for granted that it is impossible for an agent to be dynamically endowed with a principle for which it is not the metaphysical subject. He does not even consider the possibility that the creature’s dynamic endowment—that endowment whereby the creature *is able*, and *is*, and is therefore *good*—might be its endowment with the empowering Spirit of God. Within Smith’s theological horizon, the dynamic endowment of the creature could only be its being given *itself* (or more precisely the force-component of itself). What is implicitly operative in Smith’s argument, then, is identity or co-extension between what might be called (i) the “dynamical” sense of “proper”, and (ii) the “ontic” sense of proper. The energy “proper” to the creature, in the dynamical sense of being that in the creature *whereby it acts*, has to be an energy that has the creature *as its metaphysical subject*. More specifically (adopting the view of Leibniz), force is “enfolded” in body to make with it a single entity (a monad). The contrasting view would be something like the following: the radically dynamising principle in the created agent is the Holy Spirit given to and infused in the creature, so as to make, not a single entity with two *components*, but rather a union of two *wholes*, where this union is the condition for there being this one created entity (and this may well have components). (One might claim that Smith’s position *does* allow for endowment by “infusion”, since he argues only that such a mode of endowment could not account for the intrinsic being and goodness of creatures. However, that would be to attribute to Smith’s argument a nuance which it does not possess. Smith makes no distinction between one mode of empowerment which accounts for or coincides with intrinsic being, and another mode of empowerment which does not.)

Where Smith strictly (and perhaps unconsciously) *binds* the two senses of being-proper, it would seem that Milbank/Radical Orthodoxy effectively (if not explicitly or systematically) *differentiates* between them. The difference between the ontically proper and the dynamically proper is what seems to be at work in Milbank’s claim that “the very alien gift ... becomes

what is proper to” the entities which receive it—entities which are thereby empowered as “secondary” agents.¹⁶

A promising response to Smith’s charge that “participation” cannot accommodate the claim that creatures are dynamically endowed agents (where without such endowment, creatures would not be intrinsically good) would therefore be to systematically dissociate the dynamical and the ontic senses of “proper” (ensuring that this distinction is applied to the appropriate term, and not to “being”). This is precisely the objective of chapter 6 below. A more adequate explanation of some of the terms used above (e.g. “metaphysical subject”) will be delayed until then.

5.2.2. *Two Readings of Creation-as-Gift*

Between Milbank and Smith there is an implicit disagreement over the meaning of “in” and “proper” (also “own” and “possession”). What is also at stake here is the manner in which gift is thought in relation to creation. On both Milbank’s participational ontology, and Smith’s “creational” ontology, God *gives* the creature its “own” potential out of which the creature acts and expresses itself. But the inclusion of “own” or “proper” in this proposition is what ends up separating the two thinkers, for there is a difference in how the God-given gift is thought to become “proper” to the recipient. For Smith, the gift in question is effectively the same as the creature/recipient (or one of its components). For Milbank, the gift

¹⁶ “Until 1250 or so *influentia* was linked with neoplatonic notions of *processio* and remained true to its metaphorical base. Divine influence (but also finite influence) was literally an *in-fluentia*, a ‘flowing in’ of something higher to something lower to the degree that it could be received ... Since the original ‘thing’ (Being, intelligence, soul, beauty, goodness, truth, unity, etc.) is fully received from the highest level by the lower levels according to their capacity for reception, it is the very alien gift that becomes what is proper to these lower levels. Hence God is the single influence, the single unilateral and total cause of everything. Yet since he shares by giving his own nature, by giving his gifts to-be, the lower levels exert within their own sphere their own secondary and equally total causality.” John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 89-91 (pp. 88-103 are relevant here).

in question is rather the same as God, the giver, by a certain self-sharing or self-diffusion of the divine.¹⁷

The first option implicitly excludes, from the outset, the idea that what is the creature’s “own” dynamically, remains God’s “own” ontically or metaphysically. The second option, by contrast, *implies* this idea of the “doubly proper”, and calls for the development of the notion of gift along these lines. To be sure, Milbank’s affirmation of the creature’s *participatory* existence is not a denial that creatures are given themselves. It is just that the givenness of God himself, as an empowering immanent presence, is able to assume an explanatory primacy,¹⁸ whereas for a “creational ontology” like Smith’s that mode of givenness is not introduced to account for the creature’s innate being, power and goodness at all.

5.2.3. *Two Readings of Ontological Dependence on God*

For Milbank/Radical Orthodoxy, on this reading, the creature’s givenness-to-itself has as its ongoing condition the dynamical givenness of God. But for Smith, following Leibniz, the integral constitution of the creature is simply effected by God in an act of creation, where such an act is neither ongoing, *nor* involves the diffusion of the very substance of God to form the enveloping “ground” of things.

¹⁷ For a recent exploration of this idea, drawing upon the theology of Sergei Bulgakov, see John Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon” in Adrian Pabst and Christoph Schneider (eds), *Encounter Between Eastern Orthodoxy and Radical Orthodoxy: Transfiguring the World Through the Word* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 45-85. See also §8.4. below.

¹⁸ To be sure, sometimes Milbank places more emphasis on the *recipient* as gift. “Claude Bruaire argued that, if the Creation is the first receiving of gift such that it is, in itself, through and through gift without remainder, then it must originally subsist as the reflexive reception of itself as gift ... Creation is first of all a mirror as gift, and therefore it is first of all spirit, which means the giving of a gift to itself, in an inadequate attempt to make the return of gratitude to the ultimate source.” Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love” in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 253-317, here 278. My emphasis. Milbank draws on Bruaire also in his understanding of grace as a gift “without contrast” (i.e., it is not as if the gratuity of grace consists in some unnecessary arrival at a purely natural, non-gifted substrate). See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*. In Antonio López, *Spirit’s Gift: The Metaphysical Insight of Claude Bruaire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), the emphasis seems to be on the *recipient* as gift also.

“God first created the soul,” he [Leibniz] emphasizes, “or any other real unity, in such a way that everything in it arises from its own nature” ... The emphasis here is on an original goodness or sufficiency: God grants integrity “at the outset” ... at the moment of creation.¹⁹

Smith’s position is thus characterised by (1) a denial of *participatory* enfolding (the dynamical givenness of God-as-gift, which upholds the creature in being) in favour of *ontic* enfolding (force is folded into body, to make a monad whose expressions are the *unfolding* of this potential)²⁰ and (2) a denial of the need for God’s *continual* activity (for Smith, after Leibniz, this implies “perpetual divine intervention”, problematically), in favour of the initial sufficiency of God, who is thought to be like a perfect clock-maker:

Leibniz emphasizes an ordering that is inherent to nature: “For since this earlier command does not now exist, it cannot now do anything unless it left behind some continuing effect which still endures and operates”. Theories of nature that require a perpetual governance of God are, according to Leibniz, denigrations of the Creator, for what would we think of a clock maker who needed to constantly turn the hands of the clock naturally ... “If things have been formed by the command in such a way that they are capable of fulfilling the meaning of the command—then it must be admitted that things have been given a certain ability, a form of force from which the series of phenomena follows in accordance with the dictates of the original command.”²¹

At this point one might ask whether Smith’s creational ontology actually requires an “initialising” God in order to remain critically opposed to Milbank’s ontology of participation. One might avoid the idea of participatory enfolding, and so take as primary the divine act of constituting the creature ontically (i.e. one might invoke the notion of “recipient-as-gift” without also invoking the notion of “infused-giver-as-gift”), while also understanding this act as an *ongoing* act of upholding the creature in being. On this view, God’s “efficiency” would be continual—God would not generate creatures by some “proto-efficiency” but

¹⁹ *IRO*, 214. Smith cites Leibniz, *New System*, §§14-15.

²⁰ “[For Leibniz] what is compressed or folded into the monad is simply order that inheres in matter. The temporal structure of materiality permits the unfolding of this original order folded into the organism.” *IRO*, 216.

²¹ *IRO*, 216. Smith quotes Leibniz, *Nature Itself*, §6.

would rather keep giving or re-giving creatures to themselves (and somehow this would have to be the generation of always the *same* creature in each case)—and yet such enduring efficiency would not be self-diffusive, self-donating (i.e. God-infusing). This appears to be the view of Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae* (some objections to this reading are addressed at the end of this chapter):

Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect; as to ignite is the proper effect of fire. Now God causes this effect in things not only when they first begin to be, but as long as they are preserved in being; as light is caused in the air by the sun as long as the air remains illuminated. Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being.²²

If it makes sense to speak of the creativity of the Creator in terms of his continually giving creatures to themselves—his endowing them with their ontically proper potential at every instant²³ rather than just “initially”—then Smith’s appropriation of Leibniz’s *initialising* God is not required order that Smith take his stance against Milbank’s Platonism. God’s “upholding” of creatures would not be a problematic “intervention” that left no room for the creature to act itself, rather, it would be the ongoing *making-possible* of that capacity. At least, it is possible to *argue* that this view does not imply “occasionalism”,²⁴ and to accept this view without ending up with a participatory/diffusive theo-ontology. This is an important point; it prevents one from conflating the following senses of the creature’s “radical dependence” on God. First, the creature might be said to be “radically dependent” on God (if also integral, in possession of being) in the sense of being “suspended” in God-as-gift (God

²² “Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus eius; sicut ignire est proprius effectus ignis. Hunc autem effectum causat Deus in rebus, non solum quando primo esse incipiunt, sed quandiu in esse conservantur; sicut lumen causatur in aere a sole quandiu aer illuminatus manet. Quandiu igitur res habet esse, tandiu oportet quod Deus adsit ei, secundum modum quo esse habet.” Excerpt from Aquinas, *ST I. Q. 8. a. 3, corp. art.* English Dominican translation used throughout this chapter. See <http://www.newadvent.org/summa>

²³ One need not understand this as involving a passage through time on the side of God, however. See Aquinas, *ST I, Q. 46, a. 1, ad. 6*. For the sake of simplicity I have not addressed Aquinas’s doctrine of the divine application of created agents to their respective operations. This is dealt with in chapter 7 below.

²⁴ For an explanation of this term, see §6.3. below.

“given beyond himself”, as it were²⁵), embedded in the divine horizon or matrix. Second, the creature might be said to be “radically dependent” on God in the sense of having the creating-and-sustaining act of God as its *ongoing* possibility of being. This second sense might be read in terms of the first sense, but not necessarily.²⁶ Arguably, what is distinctive about Milbank’s/Radical Orthodoxy’s participatory ontology is precisely the first sense. For the claim that the creature is continually dependent on God-as-efficient-cause for its very being, does not appear to imply “participation” in any sense that would make it a distinctive thesis. Put in another way, the negation of God’s dynamical givenness to the creature, in favour of a simpler (i.e. non-diffusive) view of God’s giving the creature to itself, does not necessary negate the idea that the creature is ever-dependent on God-as-efficient-cause (though of course on Smith’s Leibnizian account, both negations *are* performed). Therefore, to say that what is distinctive about “participation” in Milbank/Radical Orthodoxy is “radical dependence”, is to miss the mark. Such dependence can certainly be read in terms of (ongoing) efficient dependence *alone* (i.e. not *also* self-diffusion/participation).

A schematic comparison may be helpful here. There are (at least) three distinct possibilities in thinking God as giver of being. In ascending order of strength, these are: (1) God gives creatures their potent (empowered) being in an *initial* act of creation, without diffusing himself as gift (Leibniz); (2) God gives creatures their potent being in an *ongoing* act of creation/sustaining, but not by diffusing himself as gift (this is possibly the view of

²⁵ See Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy”.

²⁶ The idea that God could diffuse himself so as to be ontological ground/matrix—not just efficient cause—for creatures, in one *initial* act, seems theologically dubious, especially if it is agreed that God is eternally in act and/or in sovereign possession of himself. In short, if God is given, this would presumably always be a function of his *being-given*.

Aquinas)²⁷, and (3) God gives creatures their potent being in an *ongoing* act of creation/sustaining, and does this by diffusing himself as empowering gift (Milbank).

5.2.4. *The Question of Participation in Aquinas*

In the next section, on Aquinas, another meaning again of the “causal relation” between God and the creature will be introduced, for the sake of *further* precision in regard to “participation” in Milbank. This meaning posits God as the *exemplary* cause of all the perfections that creatures possess. Here God is understood to be the infinite plenitude of Being insofar as he has no limiting principle to which his *esse* is proportioned, a plenitude in which the finite perfections of creatures “take part” by a certain imitation. It will be argued that even this “formally comparative” or “imitative” sense of participation is not what is distinctive about Milbank’s participatory ontology. For affirming that God is exemplary plenitude of being does not entail affirming that God himself (*qua* given, dynamically) is the ontological ground enfolding creatures (the self-diffusive sense of participation).

Bringing Milbank’s position into view clearly and distinctly will therefore require taking a certain distance from *both* efficient *and* exemplary causation—not so as to claim that Milbank (and others) *negate* these modes of causation, but so as to highlight what is *distinctive* about this sense of participation and how it reads these modes of causation. If Milbank *does* incorporate these modes in his ontological use of “participation”, it is all the more important to take such a distance in regard to these modes. Otherwise the temptation would be to focus solely on the creature’s “radical dependence” thought in efficient and/or

²⁷ This view may well accommodate the possibility that God *does* in fact diffuse himself—even universally in space and time. But according to (2) such self-diffusion is not understood to be a transcendental condition for the possession of being and power by creatures—even if it is the condition for the *manner* in which creatures do in fact have their being and power, historically. If divine self-diffusion is understood to mean the giving of grace, there are further complications involving the question of the *gratuity* of grace. Milbank sometimes seems to imply that the giving of grace is a transcendental condition of created being, whereas Henri de Lubac’s position appears to be the weaker position allowed for in (2) (though Milbank argues that de Lubac covertly held the stronger view). See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, and Henri De Lubac, S.J., *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998).

exemplary terms, and obscure from view the pertinent, more distinctive ways in which “participation” is being put to work here.

In this regard, it should not be taken for granted that what Aquinas means by “participation” is yet the more panentheistic thesis of Milbank. Nor should it be assumed that Milbank’s appeal to Aquinas on this point is either accurate or helpful. Milbank refers to “[t]he traditional participatory view (as summed up in Aquinas)”²⁸ as if there were only one view of participation, which was (i) perfected by Aquinas and (ii) affirmed the infusion of God into creatures:

The ruling principle of this philosophy or theology, which is derived directly from the Thomist real distinction [between *essentia* and *esse*], is the paradoxical ‘superaddition of the most inward and essential,’ in continuity with the ideas of the neoplatonist Proclus, who proclaimed ... that the highest cause always works within things ‘more inwardly’ than lower causes. Thus the *esse* of God gives existence to everything and is the existence of everything, even though ‘existence’ is the enigma most proper to each separate reality.²⁹

However, as will be shown in the next major section, when Aquinas appropriates Proclean (and Pseudo-Dionysian) *processio*³⁰ in order to account for the being of creatures, he does not think the highest cause as “inward” to lower causes in a *self-diffusive* manner; God is not thought to give his “own nature” to creatures so as to make them be. Milbank fails to notice this, and therefore overstates the Neoplatonism of Aquinas. If the self-communication of the

²⁸ Milbank, “The Double Glory”, 202.

²⁹ Milbank, “The Double Glory”, 204-5. He cites Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*.

³⁰ “Until 1250 or so *influentia* was linked with neoplatonic notions of *processio* and remained true to its metaphorical base. Divine influence (but also finite influence) was literally an *in-fluentia*, a ‘flowing in’ of something higher to something lower to the degree that it could be received ... Since the original ‘thing’ (Being, intelligence, soul, beauty, goodness, truth, unity, etc.) is fully received from the highest level by the lower levels according to their capacity for reception, it is the very alien gift that becomes what is proper to these lower levels. Hence God is the single influence, the single unilateral and total cause of everything. Yet since he shares by giving his own nature, by giving his gifts to-be, the lower levels exert within their own sphere their own secondary and equally total causality.” Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 89-91.

first cause is a Proclean thesis, then Milbank overstates the continuity between Aquinas and Proclus.³¹

5.2.5. *Two Possible Responses to Smith*

Above it was said that an appropriate response to Smith’s argument against “participation” is to dissociate the ontic and the dynamical senses of “proper”, and thus to canvass the idea that creatures are dynamically endowed with the gift of God himself. Another response has now appeared, however—to emphasise that “participation” names simply the imitative “taking-part” of the creature’s *finite* proper form (and act of being) in the infinite Being of God. Thus, without introducing the self-diffusive sense of participation, one might grant that God (continually) gives each creature its *ontically proper* dynamic centre out of which it acts. “Participation” thus only enters as a relation of partial imitation between finite and infinite intensities of being (and power), whereby the infinite is thought to eminently pre-contain all the riches that creatures might receive. That is, perfections such as being, unity, truth, goodness and power are thought to be infinite or unlimited *in themselves* (and this how God possesses all perfection) and finite only when combined with some limiting principle *in creatures*.

To repeat, if one agrees that (a) the intrinsic being and goodness of things in the world should be affirmed, and that (b) this should be accommodated within a theological framework (as opposed to celebrating pure immanence, atheistically), and that (c) this requires that creatures be thought as dynamically endowed by God, then one’s response to Smith’s critique of participatory ontology could be of two kinds. Either one moves *toward* Smith’s position by admitting that ontological participation is only “formally comparative” as above—in which

³¹ For other passages on participation, see, e.g., Milbank, “The Shares of Being or Gift, Relation and Participation: an Essay on the Metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou.” Centre of Theology and Philosophy (2006), accessible at www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php#milbank esp. 28-34, 54; and Milbank’s introductions to *TST2* and *BR*.

case one is left open to the objection that Milbank’s use of “participation” is superficial, doing little work if any (this is not the path taken in the following chapters). Or alternatively, one moves *away* from Smith’s position by (i) agreeing that “participation” names the creature’s dynamical endowment with God-as-gift (as above), and (ii) following through with this interesting, if more difficult position (the task of chapter 6).

5.3. Participation, Goodness, and Intrinsic Denomination in Aquinas

As already explained,³² the accuracy of Milbank’s reading(s) of Aquinas in support of his own position, is in many instances questionable. Here the focus is Aquinas’s understanding of participation. On one hand, it is true that *methexis* has “fundamental significance” in the metaphysics of Aquinas,³³ and that the Angelic Doctor is influenced by Neoplatonism in this regard.³⁴ On the other hand, Aquinas stresses that the being and goodness of creatures is “intrinsically denominated”, and accounts for this with an Aristotelian emphasis on the “ontic” forms of things—resulting in position which, in one important respect, is closer to Smith’s creational ontology than to Milbank’s ontology of participation. The exegesis of esteemed Aquinas scholar Rudi te Velde, as followed next, makes this clear. Aquinas imposes an important restriction on the Neoplatonic axiom, *bonum est diffusivum sui* (the good is self-diffusive) when adapting it to the relation between Creator and creature. God is said to communicate not himself, but a certain likeness (similitude) of himself to creatures. Amongst scholars of Aquinas, te Velde’s reading is not controversial. For example, none of

³² See §2.9.1. above.

³³ David C. Schindler, “What’s the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context” in *The Saint Anselm Journal* 3.1 (2005), 1-27, here, 2. His citations include Cornelio Fabro, *La Nozione Metafisica di Partecipazione Secondo S. Tommaso d’Aquino*, 2nd edn (Torino: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1950); L.-B. Geiger, *La participation dans la philosophie de saint Thomas d’Aquin*, 2nd edn (Paris: Vrin, 1953); Joseph de Finance, *Être et agir* (Paris: P.U.F., 1945).

³⁴ See Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); William Norris Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994): 89-101; John F. Wippel, “Participation and the Problem of the One and the Many” in *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 94-131.

the relevant analyses by O’Rourke, Wippel, Clarke,³⁵ Brock,³⁶ and Ralph McInerny,³⁷ attributes to Aquinas the “divinely self-diffusive” view of ontological participation that seems to characterise Milbank’s theo-ontology.

5.3.1. *Different Senses of “Participation”*: Aquinas’s Response to Boethius

Te Velde begins his analysis of Thomas Aquinas’s notion of “participation” by looking at the latter’s commentary on Boethius’ thoughts on goodness.³⁸

Thomas begins [his excursus on participation] with a kind of etymological explanation: “to participate is, as it were, to take a part of something” (*partem capere*). We may therefore speak of participation, Thomas goes on, when something receives (or: has) in particular fashion that what belongs to another universally.³⁹

He explains that for Aquinas the participating subject in question is *not identical* with the perfection it possesses partially; other subjects can therefore share in that perfection.⁴⁰ To elaborate: implicit in Aquinas’s argument is the claim that there could be *only one metaphysical subject* which is really identical with a certain perfection (such as “goodness” or “being”). There could not possibly be numerically distinct beings, all of which are identical to, say, the plenitude of *esse* (roughly: Being), since then there could be no real principle of difference that would allow for such plurality. The non-identity required for multiple possession (many subjects “sharing in” the one perfection) is understood here in terms of *partial* possession, where (to anticipate) this partiality is due to the finitude of the

³⁵ See previous footnote.

³⁶ Stephen L. Brock, “Harmonizing Plato and Aristotle on *Esse*: Thomas Aquinas and the *De hebdomadibus*”, *Nova et Vetera*, English Edition 3 (2007), 465-94.

³⁷ See Ralph McInerny, “Saint Thomas on *De hebdomadibus*” in MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness*, 74-97.

³⁸ Chapter 1 of te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality* [henceforth, *PS*] is devoted to Aquinas’s *In librum Boethii De hebdomadibus exposition* [*In de hebd.*]

³⁹ *PS*, 11. He cites *In de hebd.*, lect. 2, n. 24: “Est autem participare quasi partem capere; et ideo quando aliquid particulariter recipit id quod ad alterum pertinet universaliter, dicitur participare illud.” All translations in this section are te Velde’s.

⁴⁰ *PS*, 11.

receiving principle. Conversely, infinite or non-partial possession of a perfection *P*—possession of *P* without the qualification of *part-icipation*—entails *being identical to P*.

In sum, on this view real possession of *P*—to be metaphysical subject for *P*—occurs in two modes, and these are understood to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive: (1) *infinite*, or in other words the subject’s *identity* with *P* (where identity-with-*P* is necessarily unique to this subject) and (2) limited or *participatory*, or in other words the subject’s *difference* from *P* (where this leaves the possibility of many other subjects also possessing partially the same *P*, not to mention the unique divine subject possessing *P* infinitely, at least if *P* can be properly ascribed to God). “Infinite possession of *P*” and “identity with *P*” form a mutually entailing pair here, as does the opposite pair, “participation in *P*” and “non-identity with *P*”. In the argument just given, it is evident that the axiom stating that “unlimited possession means identity” (UPI) is assumed and is primary. UPI, along with (i) the claim that identity with *P* is necessarily *unique* (let this be understood as already included in UPI), and (ii) the commitment to the possibility of there being multiple subjects each of which supports or instantiates the *same* perfection in some sense, is what motivates the introduction of participation as a principle of diversity.

Returning to the text: Aquinas then outlines three different modes of participation. First, there is the “logical relations of species, genus and individual ... man is said to participate in animal because man does not possess the intelligible content of animal in all its amplitude and extension (*secundum totam communitatem*).”⁴¹ Likewise, Socrates is not identical with man, the common species in which he is included. Te Velde stresses that this mode or sense of

⁴¹ PS, 12. He cites *In de hebd.* lect. 2, n. 24: “Homo dicitur participare animal, quia non habet rationem animalis secundum totam communitatem; et eadem ratione Socrates participat hominem.”

participation is logical, not ontological. For Aquinas does not view genus or species as really separate entities; in this he sides with Aristotle, against Plato.⁴² Second, there are

the relations of matter-form and subject-accident. For a substantial or an accidental form, which considered in itself is universal, is restricted to this or that subject in which it is received.⁴³

What is introduced here is the distinction between (i) form or universal considered *in se*, and (ii) form or universal considered *in res* (concretely, as combined with its individual subject).

Hence the receiving principle may be said to participate in the received form. The reason for speaking of participation is that the form, which—simply viewed in itself—can be shared in by any number of different subjects, is restricted by this particular subject of instance of matter in which it is received.⁴⁴

This accords with Aristotle’s view that form and matter do not exist separately but only in the composite.⁴⁵

Third, and most importantly, the effect is said to participate in the cause, especially when the effect is “not equal (*non adaequat*) to the power of the cause”, just as sunlight is less intensely present in the air that is lit up, than in the sun itself.⁴⁶ As te Velde explains (especially in his later chapters), this classification allows Aquinas to correct Boethius’

⁴² PS, 12-13. Te Velde also refers to *In VII Metaphisica*, lect 1, n. 1328, where Aquinas also denies that species participates in genus, in the context of Aristotle’s criticism of Plato’s ideas. “This Platonic view ... leads to an opposition between what is said of something by participation and what belongs to something substantially or essentially (*per se*). But from Aristotle’s point of view this opposition is not necessary, since for him the generic essence does not exist apart from the difference which constitutes the species” (13). On this page te Velde cites also *In de hebd.*, lect. 3, n. 45 in support of the view that “what is said by participation in this first way can also be predicated substantially.”

⁴³ PS, 13; *In de hebd.*, lect. 2, n. 24: “Similiter etiam subiectum participat accidens, et materia formam; quia forma substantialis vel accidentalis, quae de sui ratione communis est, determinatur ad hoc vel ad illud subiectum.”

⁴⁴ PS, 13-14.

⁴⁵ PS, 14. See also, e.g. Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Z, §14.

⁴⁶ PS, 14; *In de hebd.*, lect. 2, n. 24: “Et similiter effectus dicitur participare suam causam, et praecipue quando non adaequat virtutem suae causae; puta, si dicamus quod aer participat lucem solis, quia non recipit eam in ea claritate qua est in sole.” This is a Pseudo-Dionysian image.

problematic opposition between “to be something substantially” and “to be something by participation.”⁴⁷

The problem that Boethius addresses is as follows (te Velde’s analysis is paraphrased here).⁴⁸ If it were true that each creature is good on account of itself, or by reason of its essence, there would be no difference between the creature and God, who is goodness itself. On the other hand, if we denied that creatures are good in themselves, it seems we have to deny the Christian affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of creation. Now since Boethius approaches the problem of the goodness of creatures through the Aristotelian lens dividing being into substance and accident,⁴⁹ he is forced to deny both that creatures are substantially good (otherwise they would be the same as God) and that creatures are good by participation (which supposedly entails only accidental modification, which is not enough to make creatures good in themselves). His own solution is to claim first that creatures are good *relatively*, insofar as they receive their being from the Creator, who is essentially good. Second, creatures are perfect “in themselves” not essentially but by virtue of something that accrues to their essence, namely, their power to operate (*virtus*).⁵⁰

In this commentary on Boethius, says te Velde, Aquinas expresses no opinion about whether this argument is satisfactory. However, it is clear in other texts that Aquinas attempts to reconcile the Augustinian affirmation of the intrinsic goodness of creation with the exclusive affirmation of God’s essential goodness, using the notion of participation in a special way.

⁴⁷ PS, 14-15; *In de hebd.*, lect.3, n.44: “Ad intellectum huius questionis considerandum est, quod in ista quaestione praesupponitur quod aliquid esse per essentiam et per participationem sint opposita. Et in uno quidem supradictorum participationis modorum manifeste verum est: scilicet secundum illum modum quod subiectum dicitur participare accidens, vel materia forma. (...) Boetius autem hic loquitur secundum illum participationis modum quo subiectum participat accidens; et ideo ex opposito dividitur id quod substantialiter et participative praedicatur.”

⁴⁸ See also Ralph McNerny, “Saint Thomas on *De hebdomadibus*” in MacDonald (ed.), *Being and Goodness*, 74-97; Stephen L. Brock, “Harmonizing Plato and Aristotle on *Esse*”.

⁴⁹ Aristotle, *Categories*, esp. 1^b25-2^a4.

⁵⁰ PS, 18-19.

Participation, for Aquinas, is not merely accidental, but accounts even for the substantial being of created things. The third, causal sense of participation indicated above is invoked to address the problems of how (1) creatures are good through a goodness of their own rather than merely “relatively” as in Boethius, while at the same time being good through the divine goodness, and how (2) participation makes creatures essentially good rather than just accidentally good.

Te Velde writes that Aquinas appropriates the Neoplatonic principle of the self-diffusion of the Good, although for the Christian theologian this is by way of God’s free act of creation rather than by a necessary or naturalistic diffusion.⁵¹ Aquinas reads God’s communication of goodness in terms of efficiency. “God’s *communicatio boni* results in a real and intrinsic goodness of creatures. God communicates a likeness (*similitudo*) of his goodness to creatures, which thereby acquire a form of goodness of their own.”⁵² This contrasts with the view of Boethius, who admits that God communicates intrinsic *being* to creatures, but not intrinsic *goodness*. “For Boethius it is on account of its relation to the first Good that a creature can be said to be good in its substantial being.”⁵³

In *De Veritate* (the subject of chapter te Velde’s chapter 2), Aquinas explicitly contests this view, that creatures are good by “extrinsic relation.” He presents this view in the form of an objection: “... Boethius says in *De hebdomadibus*, everything is called good insofar as it flows from the first good. So the creature is not called good in virtue of a formal goodness in itself but by the divine goodness.”⁵⁴ Aquinas does not dispute that creatures are good by the divine goodness, that they receive their goodness from God. *The issue is whether the*

⁵¹ PS, 21-23.

⁵² PS, 23.

⁵³ PS, 24.

⁵⁴ *De veritate*, Q. 21, a. 4, obj. 2: “Sed creatura dicitur esse bona per respectum ad primam bonitem, quia secundum hoc unumquodque dicitur bonum quod a primo bono defluit, ut dicit Boetius in lib. *De hebdomadibus*; ergo creatura non denominatur bona ab aliqua formali in ipsa existente, sed ipsa bonitate divina.”

“denominating form” whereby a creature is “formally called good” is the divine goodness itself (Boethius), or the creature’s own goodness (Aquinas). For Aquinas, Boethius’ position is too close to the Platonic theory of ideas. The Angelic Doctor writes: “[For the Platonists] all things are formally good by the first goodness, *not as by a connected (immanent) form but as by a separate (transcendent) form.*”⁵⁵

In agreement with Aristotle, Aquinas objects to the Platonic assumption, that whatever can be thought separately can really exist separately. There is no subsistent idea of man, in which particular men participate, as Plato thought.⁵⁶ Thus each genus and species is a logical (‘intentional’) entity, not a real one. Yet there is an important exception or qualification to this objection. Aquinas admits that since the idea of the good is truly universal—unlike generic or specific ideas like “animal” or “man”—it can be said to be the same as the real and universal principle of things, which is God. However, a crucial problem remains. For Platonism (on Aquinas’s view) the Idea is simply an *exemplary* cause or principle, and *this cannot account for the goodness that things have in themselves*. Te Velde writes:

But if the good is a principle and a cause, it must effect something that is like itself (since: *omne agens agit sibi simile*). According to Aquinas, the causality of the idea of the good must also be understood in an effective sense. Being an active principle the first goodness must effectively communicate a likeness of itself to things, so that they are given a form of goodness and therefore become good in themselves.⁵⁷

Hence Aquinas “corrects” Boethius’ view by modifying “ideal participation” with “the efficiency of the first cause”. He writes that things are good both “formally in virtue of an

⁵⁵ *De veritate*, Q. 21. a. 4, corp. art: “Et ideo platonici dixerunt quod omnia sunt bona formaliter bonitate prima non sicut forma coniuncta sed sicut forma separata.” My emphasis.

⁵⁶ *PS*, 24-25. *De veritate*, Q. 21. a. 4, corp. art: “Ad cuius intellectum sciendum est quod Plato ea quae possunt separari secundum intellectum ponebat etiam secundum esse separata. Et ideo sicuti homo potest intelligi praeter Socratem et Platonem, ita ponebat hominem esse praeter Socratem et Platonem, quem dicebat per se hominem et ideam hominis, cuius participatione Socrates et Plato homines dicebantur.”

⁵⁷ *PS*, 26.

immanent form given to them as a likeness of the highest good, and furthermore (*ulterius*) in virtue of the first goodness as the exemplary and effective principle of all created goodness.”⁵⁸

Aquinas’s solution to the problem raised by Boethius, then, is to think participation more radically such that it is no longer relegated to the accidental. Creatures are given *intrinsic* being by God, inasmuch as they are each given a *proper* form (in the terms of this thesis: an *ontically* proper form). Yet this intrinsic being “participates” in the divine being. The creature’s being is finite and radically dependent on God as efficient cause (not holding simply “on account of” the creature or its essence), and “takes part” in the full plenitude of God who is exemplary cause. And inasmuch as it is a function (a “transcendental property”) of being, goodness follows this pattern—it is in creatures intrinsically yet by imitative participation.⁵⁹

Finally, this account is incorporated into Aquinas’s summary of the threefold sense of created goodness:

Something can be called good both (1) in virtue of its being and (2) in virtue of added properties (*proprietas*) or (3) relation (*habitus*). Thus a man is called good insofar as he is a man; or insofar as he is just and chaste; or insofar as he is ordained to ultimate happiness.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ PS, 26; *De veritate*, Q. 21. a. 4, corp. art: “... omne agens invenitur sibi simile agere; unde si prima bonitas sit effectiva omnium bonorum, oportet quod similitudinem suam imprimat in rebus effectis, et sicut unumquodque dicitur bonum sicut forma inherente per similitudinem summi boni sibi inditam, et ulterius per bonitatem primam, sicut per exemplar et effectivum omnis bonitatis creatae. Et quantum ad hoc opinio Platonis sustineri potest. Sic igitur dicimus secundum communem opinionem, quod omnia sunt bona creata bonitate formaliter sicut forma inherente, bonitate vero increata sicut forma exemplari.”

⁵⁹ PS, 28-29; *De Veritate*, Q. 21, a. 5: “In creatura autem est esse receptum vel participatum. Unde dato quod bonitas absoluta diceretur de re creata secundum esse suum substantiale, nihilominus adhuc remaneret habere bonitatem per participationem, sicut et habere esse participatum.”

⁶⁰ *De Veritate*, Q. 21., a. 2 ad. 6: “Aliquid potest dici bonum et ex suo esse et ex aliqua proprietate vel habitudine superaddita; sicut dicitur homo bonus et in quantum est iustus et castus vel ordinatus ad beatitudinem.”

Sense (1) is the focus of Aquinas’s radicalisation of participation (against Boethius, who only admits the other two senses of goodness for creatures, as already explained). Sense (2) refers for te Velde to “the fully developed capacities and powers of a thing by which it is able to operate well.”⁶¹ Boethius’ “accidental participation” holds true here. Sense (3) refers the creature to God, who is the ultimate End. Inasmuch as the creature is not its own end but is ordained to the End, it “participates” in the Good.⁶²

Aquinas associates these three senses of participation with Augustine, with the author of *Liber de causis*, and with Boethius.⁶³ Regarding Augustine’s view, Aquinas agrees that only God is good absolutely, without needing an accidental addition in order to be fully perfect. Creatures, by contrast, achieve their fullest perfection by way of (2) “accidental” development, habituation and operation. Thus while the goodness of creatures varies and is somewhat precarious, the goodness of God is immutable.⁶⁴ Regarding the *Liber de causis*, Aquinas agrees that God alone is pure goodness, since only in God are essence and being (*esse*) really one. Creatures, however, have a distinct and finite receiving principle (*essentia*) that limits *esse*.⁶⁵ Their intrinsic goodness therefore (1) participates in that pure goodness

⁶¹ PS, 28.

⁶² *De veritate*, Q. 21, a. 5: “Unde et bonum quod habet rationem finis non potest dici de creatura nisi praesupposito ordine Creatoris ad creaturam. Dato igitur quod creatura esset ipsum suum esse sicut et Deus, adhuc tamen esse creaturae non haberet rationem boni nisi praesupposito ordine ad Creatorem; et pro tantum adhuc diceretur bona per participationem et non absolute in eo quod est. Sed esse divinum, quod habet rationem boni non praesupposito aliquo alio, habet rationem boni per se ipsum; et haec videtur esse intentio Boetii in lib. *De hebdomadibus*.”

⁶³ PS, 27; *De veritate*. Q. 21, a. 5: “Dicendum quod secundum tres auctores oportet dicere creaturas non esse bonas per essentiam sed per participationem, scilicet secundum Augustinum, Boetium et auctorem libri *De Causis*, qui dicit solum Deum esse bonitatem puram: sed tamen diversis rationibus ad unam positionem moventur.”

⁶⁴ PS, 27-8.

⁶⁵ PS, 28. *De veritate*. Q. 21, a. 5: “Deus autem est bonitas per essentiam, in quantum eius essentia est suum esse. Et haec videtur esse intentio Philosophi in lib. *De causis* (prop. 9), qui dicit solam divinam bonitatem esse bonitatem puram.” In the same section: “In creatura autem est esse receptum vel participatum. Unde dato quod bonitas absoluta diceretur de re creata secundum esse suum substantiale, nihilominus adhuc remaneret habere bonitatem per participationem, sicut et habere esse participatum.”

who is God. The teleological subordination of the creature to God, the highest good, is associated with Boethius, and gives (3) the final sense of participation.⁶⁶

In sum, in his commentary on Boethius’ *De hebdomadibus*, Aquinas distinguishes between (a) the merely logical “participation” of the individual in its species or genus, and of a species in its respective genus, (b) the real “participation” of a subject in its accidents, and of matter in form, whereby a repeatable form (accidental or essential) is determined to one thing, which is now such (e.g. a man) or qualified (e.g. white), and (c) the real “participation” of an effect in its cause. In *De Veritate*, Aquinas distinguishes between (1) ontological “participation” whereby a creature has intrinsic being, (2) accidental “participation”, which one might link with (b) above, and (3) the final or teleological sense of “participation”. He gives an account of (1) ontological participation by turning to (c) the participation of an effect in its cause.⁶⁷ This is understandable, given that Aquinas takes the view that (1) ontological participation is neither (a) merely logical nor (b) merely accidental.

5.3.2. Summary

For Aquinas it is necessary to affirm, in Aristotelian fashion, the *proper or inherent form* (*forma inhaerente*) of the creature; without this ontically proper form one could not “denominate” the creature as a being, and as good, by *intrinsic* denomination. Put negatively, it is unsatisfactory for Aquinas to simply refer the creature to God “Platonically”. It is insufficient to say that the creature is good by virtue of God’s essential, absolute goodness, or in relation to some heavenly, exemplary form (*eidos*, or *forma exemplari*).⁶⁸ For that reason Aquinas understands the creature to be a *metaphysical subject* for its proper form, to really

⁶⁶ See note 53 above.

⁶⁷ See *PS*, chapter 6 for more detail on this link.

⁶⁸ *De veritate*, Q. 21. a. 4, corp. art: “Sic igitur dicimus secundum communem opinionem, quod omnia sunt bona creata bonitate formaliter sicut *forma inhaerente*, bonitate vero increata sicut *forma exemplari*.” My emphasis.

and intrinsically possess the perfection of being such (e.g. a man). The creature’s *substantial* form is what makes it be—form gives being, *forma dat esse*—and be the sort of being it is; accidental forms, such as virtue, can only account for the creature’s accidental being (whereas a grounding is sought for the creature’s essential, though God-given, goodness). And since goodness follows from the perfection of *being*, the creature’s substantial form is the real, ontic principle (the inner formal cause, rather than the divine efficient cause) of the intrinsic goodness of the creature.

Aquinas’s line of argument can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Creatures are intrinsically (though dependently) good. For that reason they must be called good by “intrinsic denomination” (though extrinsic denomination might be appropriate *also*).
- (2) Intrinsic denomination in “goodness” requires an *ontic* basis in the creature said to be “intrinsically good”; the formal principle of the creature’s goodness has to be some reality (form, act) taking that creature as its metaphysical subject.
- (3) Intrinsic denomination in “goodness” must also be based upon some reality that is *essential* to the creature in question, hence it is based on *substantial* ontic form and not just accidental perfections.
- (4) Therefore the substantial form of the creature is the formal principle by which the creature is intrinsically (if dependently) good, prior to any super-added perfection.

There is no indication, then, that the ontological (i.e. accounting-for-being) use that Aquinas makes of “participation”, transcends a strictly ontic sense of “proper”. When Aquinas considers a creature, and points toward some principle *P* that is “in” or “proper to” or “inherent in” that creature—where *P* is the truth-maker for the creature’s intrinsic being and intrinsic goodness—“proper to” means *ontically proper*. For this orthodox Christian

theologian, the divine essence cannot be ontically proper to a creature—and therefore the “participation” of *P* (i.e., substantial form) in divine being is *merely by imitation and similitude*:

[I]t is in the nature of every act to communicate itself as, far as possible. Wherefore every agent acts forasmuch as it is in act: while to act is nothing else than to communicate as far as possible that whereby the agent is in act. Now the divine nature is supreme and most pure act: wherefore it communicates itself as far as possible. It communicates itself to creatures by likeness only: this is clear to anyone, since every creature is a being according to its likeness to it.⁶⁹

Thus it would seem that Aquinas (i) reads the Platonic view in terms of an exhaustive opposition between ontically immanent form and separately transcendent form (“[For the Platonists] all things are formally good by the first goodness, *not as by a connected (immanent) form but as by a separate (transcendent) form*”⁷⁰) and then (ii) accounts for intrinsic being and goodness in creatures by appealing primarily to the immanent side of this opposition, in disagreement with “the Platonists” who appeal to the transcendent side alone. In this ontical discourse, what is barred from view (if not excluded altogether) is self-communication of divine essence by a certain *dynamical* indwelling that is said to give creatures intrinsic being and goodness. In short, Aquinas does *not* appeal to some *non-ontic immanence of God in creatures* when accounting for the being and goodness of creatures.

⁶⁹ *De Potentia*, Q. 2, a. 1, corp. art. The communication of divine essence from God the Father to God the Son is another matter. “Now even as when our intellect understands itself there is in it a word proceeding and bearing a likeness to that from which it proceeds, so, too, in God there is a word bearing the likeness of him from whom it proceeds. The procession of this word transcends in two ways the procession of our word. First, because our word differs from the essence of the intellect, as already stated, whereas the divine intellect being by its very essence in the perfect act of intellectuality, cannot be the recipient of an intelligible form that is not its essence: consequently its word is essentially one with it. Secondly, the divine nature itself is its intellectuality, wherefore a communication that takes place in an intellectual manner, is also a communication by way of nature, so that it can be called a begetting, and thus again the divine word surpasses the procession of our word, and Augustine (*De Trin.* i) assigns this mode of generation.”

⁷⁰ *De veritate*, Q. 21, a. 4, corp. art. “Et ideo platonici dixerunt quod omnia sunt bona formaliter bonitate prima non sicut forma coniuncta sed sicut forma separata.” My emphasis.

5.3.3. *Objections to this Reading of Aquinas*

One might object that the texts on which this summary argument is based, do not reflect the more mature view of Aquinas, that *actus* is primary, and the perfection of perfections.⁷¹ To accommodate this insight, it needs to be said that the reality or principle inherent in the creature and by virtue of which it is able to be called good by intrinsic denomination, is its *esse* (its *actus essendi*, not accidental *esse*). In response to this objection, neither substantial form *nor* proper *esse* are “doubly-proper” in the metaphysics of Aquinas; both terms are therefore *ontical* (they are said to be metaphysically proper to the subject/entity of which they are affirmed⁷²). On his view, the *esse* of a particular entity is not also the *esse* of another entity, nor can the form of one entity also be the form of another entity. The most that can be in common between two entities is “form” *considered as belonging to no entity in particular*, or *esse considered as belonging to no entity in particular*, and this does not change when two entities of the “same” genus or species are considered (or even two entities with the “same” accident).⁷³ When Aquinas relates creatures to God, he denies that divine *esse* might also be the *esse* of some creature, even partially (divine being is simple, and must either be given completely or not at all).⁷⁴

A second objection cites *Summa Theologiae, Prima Pars*, question 8:

Now since God is very being by His own essence, created being must be His proper effect ...
Therefore as long as a thing has being, God must be present to it, according to its mode of being. But being is innermost in each thing and most fundamentally inherent in all things

⁷¹ *De Potentia*, Q. 7, a. 2, ad 9.

⁷² This does not exclude being dynamically proper, but it does exclude being dynamically proper *as an indwelling “other”*. This will be explained in chapter 6.

⁷³ See notes 43 and 44 above.

⁷⁴ See, e.g. Aquinas, *ST I. Q. 3 a. 4 ad 1*, also a. 8; *SCG I. ch. 26*; *De Potentia* Q. 7 a. 2 ad 4. See also Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas*, 110-23, esp. 115.

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since it is formal in respect of everything found in a thing ... Hence *it must be that God is in all things, and innermostly*.⁷⁵

However, nothing in this passage indicates that God’s immanence to the creature, as first cause present at its effect and in the recipient of that effect, implies divine self-diffusion. Other relevant passages included in this question affirm that God is present in creatures as a giver of being (God’s omnipresence in the sense of omniscience is also affirmed)—but again, there is no suggestion that that God’s giving of creaturely being involves, or is tied up with, some mode of communication of divine being:

Since place is a thing, to be in place can be understood in a twofold sense; either by way of other things—i.e. as one thing is said to be in another no matter how; and thus the accidents of a place are in place; or by a way proper to place; and thus things placed are in a place. Now in both these senses, in some way God is in every place; and this is to be everywhere. First, as *He is in all things giving them being, power and operation*; so He is in every place as giving it existence and locative power. Again, things placed are in place, inasmuch as they fill place; and God fills every place; not, indeed, like a body, for a body is said to fill place inasmuch as it excludes the co-presence of another body; whereas by God being in a place, others are not thereby excluded from it; indeed, *by the very fact that He gives being to the things that fill every place, He Himself fills every place*.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Cum autem Deus sit ipsum esse per suam essentiam, oportet quod esse creatum sit proprius effectus eius; sicut ignire est proprius effectus ignis. Hunc autem effectum causat Deus in rebus, non solum quando primo esse incipiunt, sed quandiu in esse conservantur; sicut lumen causatur in aere a sole quandiu aer illuminatus manet. Quandiu igitur res habet esse, tandiu oportet quod Deus adsit ei, secundum modum quo esse habet. Esse autem est illud quod est magis intimum cuilibet, et quod profundius omnibus inest, cum sit formale respectu omnium quae in re sunt, ut ex supra dictis patet. Unde oportet quod Deus sit in omnibus rebus, et intime”. *ST I. Q. 8 art. 2, corp. art.* My emphasis.

⁷⁶ “Respondeo dicendum quod, cum locus sit res quaedam, esse aliquid in loco potest intelligi dupliciter, vel per modum aliarum rerum, idest sicut dicitur aliquid esse in aliis rebus quocumque modo, sicut accidentia loci sunt in loco; vel per modum proprium loci, sicut locata sunt in loco. Utroque autem modo, secundum aliquid, Deus est in omni loco, quod est esse ubique. Primo quidem, sicut est in omnibus rebus, ut dans eis esse et virtutem et operationem, sic enim est in omni loco, ut dans ei esse et virtutem locativam. Item, locata sunt in loco inquantum replent locum, et Deus omnem locum replet. Non sicut corpus, corpus enim dicitur replere locum, inquantum non compatitur secum aliud corpus; sed per hoc quod Deus est in aliquo loco, non excluditur quin alia sint ibi, imo per hoc replet omnia loca, quod dat esse omnibus locatis, quae replent omnia loca.” *ST I. Q. 8 a. 2, corp. art.* See also ad. 3: “... as the soul is whole in every part of the body, so is God whole in all things and in each one [*sicut anima est tota in qualibet parte corporis, ita Deus totus est in omnibus et singulis*].” My emphasis.

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God is in all things by His power, inasmuch as all things are subject to His power; He is by His presence in all things, as all things are bare and open to His eyes; He is in all things by His essence, inasmuch as He is present to all as the cause of their being.⁷⁷

God is said to be in all things by essence, not indeed by the essence of the things themselves, as if He were of their essence; but by His own essence; *because His substance is present to all things as the cause of their being.*⁷⁸

There is no suggestion of divine self-diffusion here, even when it said that God is present in all things as giving them being *and also power and operation*. The result of this section, then, is as follows. One should not be misled by Aquinas’s repetition of the Platonic notion of *methexis*—nor by Milbank’s appeal to Aquinas—into thinking that Aquinas has a Neoplatonic cosmology of the self-diffusive/panentheistic type that Milbank would advocate.

This result is slightly tentative, however, because there is another passage in *Prima Pars*, question 8, that Milbank could capitalise on specifically in his reading of Aquinas (though he does not). When intentional existence and grace come under question, Aquinas appears to introduce or imply divine self-diffusion:

God is said to be in a thing in two ways; in one way after the manner of an efficient cause; and thus He is in all things created by Him; *in another way he is in things as the object of operation is in the operator*; and this is proper to the operations of the soul, according as the thing known is in the one who knows; and the thing desired in the one desiring. In this second way God is especially in the rational creature which knows and loves Him actually or habitually. And because the rational creature possesses this prerogative by grace ... He is said to be thus in the saints by grace ...⁷⁹

⁷⁷ “Sic ergo est in omnibus per potentiam, inquantum omnia eius potestati subduntur. Est per praesentiam in omnibus, inquantum omnia nuda sunt et aperta oculis eius. Est in omnibus per essentiam, inquantum adest omnibus ut causa essendi, sicut dictum est.” *ST I. Q. 8 a. 2, corp. art.*

⁷⁸ “Ad primum ergo dicendum quod Deus dicitur esse in omnibus per essentiam, non quidem rerum, quasi sit de essentia earum, sed per essentiam suam, quia substantia sua adest omnibus ut causa essendi, sicut dictum est.” *ST I. Q. 8 a. 2, ad 1.* My emphasis.

⁷⁹ “Respondeo dicendum quod Deus dicitur esse in re aliqua dupliciter. Uno modo, per modum causae agentis, et sic est in omnibus rebus creatis ab ipso. Alio modo, sicut obiectum operationis est in operante, quod proprium est in operationibus animae, secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente, et desideratum in desiderante. Hoc igitur secundo modo, Deus

In the light of this passage, one might attempt to read (or “retrieve”) the thought of Aquinas as follows. God is immanent in all things as a virtual object of operation, and this is what gives creatures their proper being and power (though the divine presence is *not* the proper being and power of creatures). It is said that God is in creatures and originates their being, as the *virtual* object of operation, because if God were said to be the *actual* object of operation, it could not be said that the creature’s operation presupposes its being (*agere sequitur esse*). On this view, for a creature to exist is for it to be dynamically ordered (disposed, in tension) toward operation, and this primal virtuality is the immediate effect of the indwelling of God himself, as virtual object of operation. To appropriate Aristotle’s notion of the First Mover,⁸⁰ and combine this with the Neoplatonic *bonum est diffusivum sui*: God, the Good, diffuses himself into all things, and in that way lures all things toward himself—and this is what it means for God to give being and power; the self-attraction of the Good is the essence of *to be*.

On this reading of Aquinas, God *himself* is entrusted to all creatures—and not just *intellectual* creatures—as (inchoate, “pre-grasped”) intentional *object and/or medium*. However, besides the difficulty of accommodating intentionality in non-intellectual creatures, there are at least two other problems with this reading of ontological participation in Aquinas. It is at odds with (i) the division that Aquinas makes in *De Veritate* between “essential” and “super-added” goodness. To be well-disposed and teleologically ordered toward the divine End is included in the latter category, and thus falls short of accounting for the *intrinsic*

specialiter est in rationali creatura, quae cognoscit et diligit illum actu vel habitu. Et quia hoc habet rationalis creatura per gratiam, ut infra patebit, dicitur esse hoc modo in sanctis per gratiam.” *ST I*. Q. 8 a. 3, corp. art. My emphasis.

⁸⁰ “It [God, the first mover] produces motion by being loved, and it moves the other moving things. Now if something is moved it is capable of being otherwise than as it is ... but since there is something which moves while itself unmoved, existing actually, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is.” Aristotle, *Metaphysica* A. 7. 1072^b2-9. [trans. W.D. Ross, revised J. Barnes (Revised Oxford Aristotle, 1984)].

goodness of creatures.⁸¹ It also contravenes (ii) the restrictions that Aquinas places on our intellectual vision of God in this life. A recent critique of Milbank makes these restrictions clear:

[T]he passages of Aquinas Milbank cites [in *Truth in Aquinas*] do not support his description of natural knowledge of God in this life ... To speak of a ‘vision’ of God is quite misleading with regard to ST I q12 a13 ad1. There Aquinas indeed speaks of knowledge of God based on his effects, but in a number of places he specifies just what kind of knowledge is involved here, namely the paths of remotion and eminence, which in no way remove the cognitive barrier between human beings and proper knowledge of God (i.e., of the divine essence). At ST I q12 a11 ad4 he [Aquinas] defines intellectual vision as possible only where the thing seen is present in the soul by its essence, a state of affairs describing the beatific vision but not (Aquinas always speaks in either/or terms here) our knowledge of God in this life, whether aided by grace or not. It might be thought that Milbank’s quote from ST I q12 a12 ad2 (“God is known by natural knowledge through the images of his effects”) is speaking of an ‘imaging’ or reflection of God in creatures, but the word ‘images’ simply translates *phantasmata*, and hence refers only to the image within the mind of the knower of some object of sense. This is the mind ‘imaging’ the effect, not the effect ‘imaging’ God. Finally, Aquinas does not, contra Milbank’s suggestion, give any role in his discussion in question 12 of knowledge of God in this life to the participation of creaturely effects in God as their cause.⁸²

For Aquinas, then, it is not true that the divine essence is ordinarily and universally entrusted to creatures as an (infinite, and inchoately pre-grasped) object and/or medium of intentionality (thinking and willing)—this only applies to those persons enjoying the beatific vision in heaven (though without the qualification of “*inchoately pre-grasped*”).

⁸¹ See note 60 above.

⁸² “That discussion occurs only in question 13, where the issue is what names are suitable for God (a logically distinct matter ...). Here he [Aquinas] speaks only of the deficient participation of human intellects in God’s perfect intellectual power, not of the participatory status of the objects of our intellects.” Paul DeHart, “On Being Heard But Not Seen: Milbank and Lash on Aquinas, Analogy and Agnosticism”, *Modern Theology* 26 (2010), 243-77, here 262. Cf. Milbank, “Truth and Vision” in John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 19–59. ST I. Q. 12 a. 11 ad 4 reads: “... Intellectual vision is of the things which are in the soul by their essence, as intelligible things are in the intellect. And thus God is in the souls of the blessed; not thus is He in our soul, but by presence, essence and power [*Ad quantum dicendum quod visio intellectualis est eorum quae sunt in anima per suam essentiam sicut intelligibilia in intellectu. Sic autem Deus est in anima beatorum, non autem in anima nostra; sed per praesentiam, essentiam, et potentiam*].”

Finally, regardless of the results of this *second* look at Aquinas, the “ontically causal” configuration of ontological participation is what *figures explicitly* in the relevant passages. In order to be helpful, and accurate, Milbank’s linking of his own understanding of participation with that of Aquinas, would *at the very least* have to distinguish between the “exoteric” configuration of participation in Aquinas, and a possible “esoteric” configuration in Aquinas. That is, Milbank would have to clarify his identification with Aquinas by admitting that the exoteric configuration of participation does not in itself do the work that Milbank requires in his theological ontology. But as already shown, Milbank does nothing of the sort; he simply claims that his use of participation is grounded in the work of Aquinas, and that it simply continues the latter’s “Neoplatonism”. He does not appear to appreciate that there is one mode of Neoplatonism which still focuses on the ontic nature of things with Aristotle, and another mode which by contrast is more *purely* Neoplatonic, inasmuch as it is “dialectical” (in the sense of involving the self-differentiation of God as giver *and* as gift, not in the sense of “agonistic”) and panentheistic (the divine gift of God forms the ground/matrix of created beings).

5.4. Conclusion

The propriological distinction (between the ontic/metaphysical and the dynamical/expressive senses of “proper”) promises to allow one to say that God gives *himself* to creatures as their (dynamically) proper origin of act or expression, thus accommodating a “self-diffusive” view of the transcendence and immanence of God, in accordance with Milbank’s theological intentions. In fact, this distinction also allows one to appreciate the difference that Milbank misses between two modes of Neoplatonism, in terms of how the two senses of “proper” are related. On the more Aristotelian configuration of Neoplatonism/participation, the two senses of “proper” are bound strictly together. On the more Platonic configuration of Neoplatonism/participation, there is in effect a propriological distinction and thus a

“paradoxical” notion of the “doubly proper”.⁸³ Milbank would do well to associate his participatory ontology with the latter configuration *specifically*, which would mean *dissociating* his position from the former configuration in certain important respects. There is no suggestion of divine self-communication in Aquinas’s ontology of participation. One should not be misled by Aquinas’s repetition of the Platonic notion of *methexis*—nor by Milbank’s appeal to Aquinas—into thinking that Aquinas has a Neoplatonic cosmology of the self-diffusive/panentheistic type that Milbank would advocate. In the next two chapters the expressive or dynamical sense of “proper” is developed further, by giving attention to the manner in which the subject brings its power into act (chapter 6), and then to the relation between virtuality and actuality (chapter 7).

⁸³ Pushing “participation” further in this direction again, would result in a problematically “extrinsic denomination” in regard to creatures’ being and goodness—the propriological distinction would have collapsed again, but this side in favour of purely transcendent form rather than of created ontic form.

6. Expressive Hypostasis

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter the dynamical sense of possession is read in terms of “expressive hypostasis”, in a further support of the explanation of the propriological distinction. This distinction was offered in chapter 5 in order to take account of the possibility of plural possession (thus beginning the second stage of the overall argument of the thesis). The latter was itself offered as the essence or condition of gift-exchange and participation (stage one). While in this chapter there are a few comments on Milbank and some passing references to Aristotle, the “matter itself” is subjected to questioning rather than any particular text.¹

First, some clarifications are made in respect to “power” and “potency”, and also “occasionalism”. *Second*, a distinction is drawn between *dynamising* form (which can be immanent in a subject as an indwelling “other” and gift) and *predicative* form (an act, quality, shape, perfection or property that is always *of* its subject in the ontic/metaphysical sense). *Third*, the “dynamic interval” between virtuality and actuality is introduced. *Fourth*, the “agency problem” is addressed. If the agent brings itself into act using nothing but its dynamising principle, how is it possible that this principle is released into expressive act only by the agent, and not “automatically”? It is argued that, in order that an act take place, the agent yields itself as the site or “expressive hypostasis” for that principle, as the latter rises into expressive act. Various nuances are then added to this proposal.

¹ Useful contemporary texts on the metaphysics and theology of power and agency include: Simon Oliver, *Philosophy, God and Motion* (London: Routledge, 2005); Bernard Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Lonergan, “Procession and Related Notions” in *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 106-51. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Divine and Human Action: Essays in the Metaphysics of Theism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988).

6.2. Context

In chapter 5, an encounter was staged between the “creational” ontology of James K.A. Smith, and the “participatory” ontology of John Milbank. On one hand, both theologians were found to be committed to a dynamical understanding of creatures. For Milbank and Smith, the only sort of created world that could possibly embody goodness and beauty, and thus glorify God, is one in which creatures are empowered as agents by God. On the other hand, it was proposed that these two accounts are divided from each other in regard to a certain “propriological distinction” (a newly-coined expression). That is, when it comes to thinking the dynamising principle in the creature whereby it is able to act, Milbank effectively distinguishes between a dynamical and an ontic sense of being-proper-to, where Smith does not.

Yet in the work of Milbank, the dynamical sense of possession remains largely unquestioned. Perhaps the closest that Milbank comes to articulating this sense is in *The Suspended Middle*.

Until 1250 or so *influentia* was linked with neoplatonic notions of *processio* and remained true to its metaphorical base. Divine influence (but also finite influence) was literally an *in-fluentia*, a ‘flowing in’ of something higher to something lower to the degree that it could be received ... Since the original ‘thing’ (Being, intelligence, soul, beauty, goodness, truth, unity, etc.) is fully received from the highest level by the lower levels according to their capacity for reception, it is the very alien gift that becomes what is proper to these lower levels. Hence God is the single influence, the single unilateral and total cause of everything. Yet since he shares by giving his own nature, by giving his gifts to-be, the lower levels exert within their own sphere their own secondary and equally total causality.²

² John Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 89-91 (pp. 88-103 are relevant here). Just as Milbank would predict, contemporary analytic philosophy of dynamism and causal influence seems to be lacking in the idea of *processio* and “flowing in” (one agent sharing its being and power with another). See, e.g., George Molnar, *Powers: A Study in Metaphysics*, ed. Stephen Mumford (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003); Brian Ellis, *The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism* (Chesam: Acumen, 2002).

Even here Milbank only offers an affirmative *gesture* toward a pre-modern, “paradoxical” mode of thought, rather than any sustained *questioning* of the metaphysical problem(s) raised. *How is it* that what is “alien” or “other” to the creature, since it is divine, can become also “proper” to the creature (and what sense of “proper” is in play here)?³ It would appear that the “dynamical” sense of possession, as investigated below, is the key to answering this question (or beginning to do so).

6.3. Questioning “Power” and “Occasionalism”

It was said that on both Milbank’s and Smith’s accounts of creation, the creature’s endowment with being is inseparable from its endowment with power—power out of which the creature acts, bringing its potential into expression. The problem is that “power” and “potential” are ambiguous.⁴ In order to bring clarity here, it might seem appropriate to invoke the notion of *active* potency, and to posit *this* in the creature in order to fend off the spectre of “occasionalism”. However, it turns out that such an approach has its own problems. The outcome of this section is the proposal of a different beginning, one based on the distinction between “virtuality” and “ability”, rather than between “active” and “passive” potency. A more appropriate way to overcome “occasionalism” is to invoke “the capacity to operate”.

As shown previously,⁵ a basic claim made by Smith in his response to Milbank is as follows. If the creature does not have its own capacity to act, or in other words its own agency (the question of *free* agency is prescinded from here), then it would follow that God would “do

³ See also Milbank, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics: On the Modalities of Terror” in Connor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler, Jr, *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 452-499. “[St Paul] for the first time spoke of God as giving the gift of his *energeia*, his activity, which is also his *energetic power*, such that our acts are synergetically fused with acts that *go out* from God, and yet also *are* God. Later, a parallel fusion of human with divine *energeia* is found in pagan magical and theurgic texts ... whose suggestions are later fused with the Pauline ones by Dionysius with Areopagite ... Only within this Christian tradition does Aristotelian being becomes emphatically also supreme actuality as supreme *act*, which, like light after Plotinus, goes out from itself while remaining within itself” (498). On this page Milbank dismisses the Palamite theory of divine energies.

⁴ See Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Θ. 1.

⁵ Chapter 5.

everything”—or more precisely (for this phrase need not be taken to exclude the creature’s agency), that the creature would not actually do anything. But such would not make for an inherently good creation made up of creatures each of which has integral (though God-given) existence (note the link made between being and power). The reason that *active* rather than *passive* potency might be introduced as a bulwark against “occasionalism”, is that merely passive potency, on one reading at least, does not appear to be enough to afford creatures their own distinct agencies. For we can imagine a lump of clay as having the potential to present a human shape, and we can imagine an inert object as being potentially in another location. In both cases what “reduces” the potentiality to actuality is not the being in question, but an external agent. If it were agreed only that creatures have such passive potencies, the problematic situation in which the creature “does nothing” would not be overcome.

To be sure, the presence of passive potency in a creature does not exclude the possibility that the same creature might be able to actualise that potency itself. For example, if with Aristotle one takes the *psyche* of the animal to be the moving (transitive sense; “moving-something”) component, and the *soma* of the animal to be the moved component, then the body can be said to have a *passive* potency for, say, local motion, in relation to the *active* potency of the soul (in this case, its locomotive power).⁶ Here the passivity in question corresponds with an immanent active potency, rather than with the action of a distinct, external agent. But this does not annul the point being made here. On this reading, “passive potency” does not in

⁶ “For the soul is cause as being that from which the movement is itself derived, as that for the sake of which it occurs, and as the essence of bodies which are ensouled.” Aristotle, *De Anima* II. 4. 415^b5-15 [trans. D.W. Hamlyn (Clarendon Aristotle Series, 1968)]. “For it is the property of matter to be acted upon and to be moved, whereas causing movement and acting belongs to another capacity.” *De Generatione et Corruptione* II. 9. 335^b25-30 [trans. C.J.F. Williams (Clarendon Aristotle Series, 1982)]. In other places Aristotle is more precise, and says that it is the animal’s psychic *desire* which moves the animal. “That which is unmoved is the practical good, and that which produces movement and is moved is the faculty of desire (for that which is moved is moved in so far as it desires, and desire as actual is a form of movement) while that which is moved is the animal; and the instrument by which desire produces movement is then something bodily.” *De Anima* III. 10. 433^b15-20. “... In so far as the animal is capable of desire so far it is capable of moving itself.” *De Anima* III. 10. 433^b25-30 [trans. D.W. Hamlyn].

itself *guarantee* power of self-movement; the presence of “passive potency” does not, as such, *entail* the presence in the same entity of a correspondingly “active” potency.⁷

However, there are (at least) two difficulties associated with the notion of active potency. First, as just explained, active potency traditionally corresponds with some passive potency. If one were to equate the power to act, or the capacity to operate, with the power to bring some passive potency into act, whether in the body of the same being or in the body of another, then we automatically exclude the possibility that an operation for which a creature is responsible (in a broad sense which does not yet require “freedom”) need not correlate with passive potency at all, either immanently (in regard to the body of the agent in question) or transitively (in regard to the body of a distinct patient). But one might want to accommodate the possibility that an act of willing (for example) does not in itself involve actualisation of a passive potency (in this sense) in oneself or in another.

Second, in some circumstances the capacity to act/operate might be said to be a *passive* potency after all. In some places Aquinas says that the act of willing—the actualisation of the will—is not the actualisation of an active potency, since it is the willed *object* (as known intellectually) which has the power to bring the will into act efficaciously.⁸ Of course it is hard to see how the object’s actualisation of the will could involve, or perhaps coincide with, the will-act of *the subject in question*, if there were no sense in which that subject *actively allowed* itself to be so actualised by the object (under the aspect of its goodness, or apparent

⁷ “... one kind [of potentiality] is a potentiality for being acted on, i.e. the principle in the very thing acted on, which makes it capable of being changed and acted on by another thing *or* by itself regarded as other.” Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Θ. 1. 1046^a10-15 [trans. W.D. Ross, revised J. Barnes (Revised Oxford Aristotle, 1984)]. My emphasis.

⁸ Though not *necessarily* (only God, the supreme Good, is said to have that power): *ST* I-II. Q. 9 a. 1, ad 1. Regarding the will as passive potency, see Aquinas, *De veritate*, Q. 22, aa. 3-4; *ST* I. Q. 80 a. 2. However, according to Lonergan, “this position is not rigidly maintained: the *Pars prima* attributes to the will a *moveri ex se* [*ST* I. Q. 105 a 4, ad 2] and there are stronger expressions in the *De veritate* [Q. 22 a. 6]”. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 95-96 (see also 319nn13-14). Compare Aristotle’s theology of the divine first cause, which is unmoved, and moves by being loved, *Metaphysica* Λ. 7. 1072^a34-^b14, and note 6 above on desire.

goodness).⁹ But this might not require that the subject in question is the ontic source of the efficacious power at work in the act of will. Conceivably, all such power might come from the object/good.¹⁰

It is important, then, to distinguish between “power” in the sense of (1) energy, virtuality,¹¹ or dynamic source, and “power” in the sense of (2) ability to act.¹² If a subject is not ontically in possession of (1), that might not mean the absence of (2), as if the subject were “totally passive” in respect to some *other* agent which possesses (1). Such “total passivity” is associated with the *first* reading of “passive potency” above. This involved an *immediately* efficacious external agent—the lump of clay is moved from without, such that its motion is not also the clay’s operation.¹³ But to repeat, total passivity might be avoided even while attributing all important efficacy to (in this case) *the willed object*, on the condition that the object, in respect to the will, is fully efficacious only *mediately*. (To be sure, the mediation in question is not the mediation of one efficacious agent by another efficacy in another agent. It is rather the same efficacy at work in another, where this “in another” means the operation of the mediator.)

In light of the distinction indicated above, between virtuality and ability, the difference between the two readings of the passive/active distinction becomes clear. In the first case (the classic paradigm of moulded clay), a potency is “passive” if its subject has no *ability* to bring that potency into determinate act in (or as) an operation that is its own (the operation need not

⁹ Aquinas, *ST* I. Q. 105 a. 4, ad 3; I-II. Q. 9, a. 3, Sed contra. Cf. Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 132-42. Whether or not such a situation is compatible with the capacity to have done otherwise in exactly the same circumstance (prescinding from the act, of course), is another matter again.

¹⁰ Or perhaps from the Good as that is suggestively manifest in the particular object/good.

¹¹ For Milbank’s understanding of *virtus* see his *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd edn, 430 ff. (*actus* and *virtus* in God) and 327-80 (*virtus* and virtue); *ibid.*, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics”, 495 (*virtus* is “active possibility”).

¹² A third sense of “power” has been excluded here. According to this looser sense, a lump of clay has the “power” (i.e. potential, possibility) to have a different shape than before. See Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Θ. 1. 1046^a5-30. A fourth sense of power or potentiality (included in the passage just cited) is: invulnerability to destructive changes.

¹³ See the next footnote.

involve self-consciousness, intelligence or freedom, however). In the second case (the Thomistic paradigm of willing), a potency is “passive” if its subject has no “energy” by which it might bring this potency into act, except by sharing in and mediating the virtuality proper to another (the object). What this second paradigm requires, of course, is the very distinction under question, since it necessarily invokes two different senses of “having” or of “being proper”.

With these considerations in mind, it is safer to speak of the creature’s “capacity to operate” when attempting to avoid “occasionalism”, than to refer to “active potency”. The purpose of referring to “operation” is to account for actualities whose very meaning includes the fact that they are brought about by their subject. It would make no sense to say that thinking and willing occur in a subject by simply occurring *to* him or her. Thinking and willing are examples of actualities that are quite clearly acts *performed by* their subject. The account of empowerment given in this chapter is primarily meant to account for acts such as these—though in a rather formalistic way, and without giving attention to how freedom and intelligence determine acts in a particular way.¹⁴ This account may well be suitable for a whole range of operations performed by non-human agents. However, there are actualities whose status is difficult to determine, and this raises the problem of the exact extension of “operation”.

No attempt will be made in this chapter to deal with this problem. Some of the difficulties are as follows. If there is any sense in which it is true that “I” am doing the digestion of my food, or that “I” am doing the growing of my body, this is obviously a weaker sense than is the case

¹⁴ There is one counter-intuitive and awkward use of “operation” which is to be excluded here. This appears in the translation by E. Hussey (Clarendon Aristotle Series, 1983) of *Physica* III and IV as included in Aristotle, *A New Aristotle Reader*, ed. J.L. Ackrill, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). For example, the translation of *Physica* III. 2. 202^b20-25 is as follows: “... to be the operation of A in B, and to be the operation of B by the agency of A, are different in definition.” Thus, the “being built” of the house (to give an example of “the operation of B by the agency of A”) is said to be an “operation”. My exclusion of this use of “operation” is purely semantic, it does not necessarily mean departing from Aristotle’s understanding of causation.

with voluntary acts such as thinking and willing. These may be thought to be functions of my *psyche*, rather than simply determinations that my flesh undergoes from without, passively—but if they are, they are still essentially involuntary.¹⁵ Sensation seems also to fall in this ambiguous region, as do probably various emotions (it is another thing how one acts upon emotions, or acts so as to cultivate a certain character). Yet the distinction between “voluntary” and “involuntary” functions should not be too quickly associated with the difference between those that are freely actualised and those that are not. For this distinction seems to be applicable within animals which we do not take to be intelligent and free. In biology one distinguishes between the smooth muscle (such as that lining blood vessels and the digestive tract) whose tension and relaxation are determined by the autonomic system, and the skeletal muscle which the organism is able to tense and relax of its own accord. The dog moves itself when it runs through the field, but it would be misguided to identify this self-movement with an autonomic function just because it is not the free self-movement of a person.

Finally, it should be noted that occasionalism is, according to one careful definition at least, the denial that created beings are efficacious in bringing about change *in other things*, even as mediators of God’s effective presence (i.e. as secondary causes).¹⁶ But this might be compatible with saying that spiritual subjects are responsible for their acts of will. And even if it turned out that occasionalism and human freedom are incompatible, there have been at least three important advocates of occasionalism (al-Ghazali, Malebranche, Berkeley) whose

¹⁵ For Aristotle, a natural motion is not necessarily put into act by the subject of that nature: “...there are other natural motions in animals, which they do not experience through their own instrumentality, e.g., increase, decrease and respiration: these are experienced by every animal while it is at rest and not in motion in respect of the motion set up by its own agency; here the motion is caused by the environment and by many things that enter into the animal...” Aristotle, *Physica* VIII. 6. 259^b5-15 [trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye, revised J. Barnes (Revised Oxford Aristotle, 1984)]. See also *De Anima* III. 11.

¹⁶ See Alfred J. Freddoso, “Medieval Aristotelianism and the Case against Secondary Causation in Nature” in Thomas V. Morris (ed.), *Divine and Human Action*, 74-118. “[A]ccording to occasionalism, God is the sole efficient cause of every state of affairs that is brought about in “pure” nature, i.e., in that segment of the universe not subject to causal influence of creatures who are acting freely” (83). There is room for important differences here. Freddoso considers the versions of occasionalism found in al-Ghazali, Berkeley and Malebranche.

religious sensibility made them reject the idea that persons are in no way responsible for their actions. In fact, at least one attempt has been made to extend this to include bodily self-movement.¹⁷

However, Smith’s primary motivation in avoiding “occasionalism” is not so much the need to affirm that creatures actually move others, but the need to affirm that they are self-moving. His first concern in the theological enchantment of creation is clearly the possibility of *immanent* agency rather than *transitive* agency. This is shown by his relation to Leibniz. Smith objects to the idea of pre-established harmony between windowless monads, on the grounds that this excludes genuine interaction and relation between creatures. He suggests that this particular correction of Leibniz can be delayed, and turns happily to the dynamically enfolded structure of the Leibnizian monad. Thus in Smith’s mind “occasionalism” negates immanent agency rather than transitive agency.¹⁸ For this reason “occasionalism” is to be kept in scare quotes. Rather than dealing with occasionalism *per se* and directly, this chapter responds to Smith’s charge that an ontology of participation can only slide into “occasionalism” (the absence of immanent agency in creatures).

6.4. Specifying the Object of the Propriological Distinction

In order to specify more precisely what the propriological distinction is supposed to apply to, a distinction is required between “capacity to operate” and the “formal principle” which is said to ground that capacity. In this section it is argued that the propriological distinction can be applied validly to the *formal principle* of the capacity to operate, but not to the capacity to

¹⁷ According to Malebranche (on Freddoso’s reading), the human spirit causes its acts of will, but nothing else. On this view “it is God alone who coordinates created effects in general and who guarantees the customary concatenation of mental and bodily events in particular.” Freddoso, “Medieval Aristotelianism”, 89. By contrast, Berkeley claims that the human spirit has control over its willing and in that way *also* moves the body it inhabits. However, it is hard to see how someone holding Berkeley’s position might reconcile (a) the claim that a person moves his or her leg with (b) the denial that he or she also moves the shoe bound to that leg (since God *alone* causes that movement) (89-90).

¹⁸ James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Toward a Post-Secular Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 204-18. Henceforth: *IRO*.

operate, precisely. As will also be explained, a particular sense of “form” is in play here, namely, “dynamising” form (not “predicative” form).

As already shown, Milbank and Smith differ when it comes to giving an account of the metaphysical conditions under which a created being could possibly be an agent. Smith seems to think that the creature could only have the capacity to operate, if it were endowed with a dynamising ontic component. Milbank, by contrast, allows for the idea that a creature’s capacity to operate is dynamised by a principle which is “within” the creature yet which is *not* the creature (not even partially, as a component).¹⁹ Now what has not yet been questioned is the distinction implicit here between (i) the principle immanent in a creature on account of which a creature has the capacity to act or operate—the “formal principle” of agency—and (ii) the capacity to act or operate. As will become clear, such a distinction is required if the propriological distinction is to have any sense, and if the participatory account of creaturely agency is to have any chance of being coherent.

It appears that Smith himself requires, and also accepts, that distinction. For he proposes a Leibnizian *account* of the *fact* that creatures are able to act. That is, he begins with a theological principle which he takes to be non-negotiable when it comes to the enchantment of the world—namely, the agency of creatures, as opposed to the denial of this in “occasionalism”—and then tells a story about what metaphysical conditions must hold in the creature if they are to be agents. For Smith, the creature has, essentially, *the capacity to act*, just because it has (thanks to God’s creative act) *the ontic component*, “*force*”.²⁰ Arguably, the “force” which is said to be enfolded into the monad-creature, is not precisely the same as the latter’s capacity to act, though their meanings are tied together. For it is possible to say,

¹⁹ Cf. Graham Ward, *Cities of God*, (London: Routledge, 2000), 88-89. Things “are continually in a state of being gifted to us, animated for us, by God himself” (89). Their potential “is not contained within the material but ‘in and around it’” (88). Cited in *IRO*, 204.

²⁰ *IRO*, 215-18.

non-trivially, that the creature has a capacity to act on account of its having force, while the same is not true of “the creature has a capacity to act on account of its having the capacity to act”. The possession of the capacity to act is seen to follow from, and to be explained by, force, or by the constitutive possession of force.

A parenthetical note: This general method of “ontological derivation”²¹ is intuitively appealing, even if the value of specific accounts given in particular derivations are open to debate. Without any such derivation, one would be left with the claim that, say, a certain being has the capacity to operate, and that this is a primitive fact, one which cannot be accounted for in terms of the nature or constitution of that being.²² But it seems problematic to hold that the fact of agency could hold in anything, while denying that this is a function of a thing’s constitution or structure. The latter approach is not simply a methodological decision to describe certain facts and *leave open* whether these facts have some structure as their metaphysical condition (let alone what the nature of these conditions might be)—it is a positive *denial* of the presence of such grounding structures.

Now the “formal principle” immanent in the creature seems to allow for the propriological distinction, whereas the capacity to operate does not. It is one thing to say (*first claim*) that “capacity to operate” must take the creature in question as its metaphysical subject, and another to say (*second claim*) that the formal principle *on account of which* the creature has the capacity to operate, must take the creature as its metaphysical subject. While a respectable argument or paradigm can be offered against the second claim (this is an important objective of this chapter), there seems to be no way around the first. What sense is there in affirming that a subject *S* has its own capacity to act *C*, while denying that *C* takes *S* as its *metaphysical*

²¹ I originally wrote “metaphysical derivation”. However, given the references below to “metaphysical subject”, this might imply appealing to “ontic” principles alone, against my intention.

²² Putting aside any appeal one might also make to separate efficient or final principles.

subject? This would imply either of the following: (i) *C* is an independent entity (a “first substance”) in need of no subject (a problematic conjecture in itself), or (ii) *C* is a determination (component, property, accident, aspect, trope, relation, etc.) abiding in (or perhaps “said of”) some subject *other than S*.²³ In both cases the unity that presumably must hold between *S* and *C*, if *C* is indeed to belong to *S* in the right way (such that it is true that *C* is a fact about *S* in particular, and that *S* is an agent) seems to be excluded.

Returning to the second claim: the same restriction does not seem to apply to the *formal principle* in *S*—at least not if “form” is understood in a certain way (an alternative sense of “form” is explained shortly). On this analysis, “form” is meant as a dynamising principle “in” some subject *S*, where “in” *may or may not* represent ontic inherence. (The latter mode of inherence means being a determination, property or part of *S*, or possibly even being “said of” *S*; *S* is the metaphysical subject of what is “in” *S*.) On this reading, the form *F* is or has expressible energy. Inasmuch as it has *S* as its *dynamical* subject, *F* “takes *S* along”, as it were, within its dynamism. That is, *S* enjoys some mode of union with *F*, and is conditioned in such a way by *F*, that it is able to bring *F* into expression, or “release” the inherent dynamism of *F* into act (the import of all this will be explained shortly).

The point to be made here is as follows. This “dynamical” or “expressive” union between a subject *S* and a *formal principle* *F*, does not appear to entail logically the “ontic” or “metaphysical” union that most probably ties together the subject *S* and its *capacity to act C*. It may well be valid to say that *F* can be *dynamically* proper to *S* without also being *metaphysically* proper to *S*. (There might not be any *contradiction* in the claim that ontic union is in fact the condition for dynamical union, or in other words that the formal principle

²³ For the distinction between “being in” and “said of” see Aristotle, *Categoriae* 2. On “first substance” see *Categoriae* 5 and *Metaphysica* Z (esp. 1, 16, 17). There is of course controversy over how *ousia* should be interpreted; the Latin rendering as *substantia* is questionable.

of an agent's activity necessarily takes that agent as its metaphysical subject. However, it would appear that such "onticalism" introduces an extraneous element *to* the concept of dynamical union, though it might be believed, mistakenly, that this addition is part of "the matter itself".)

To be sure, the "form" of a subject might also be understood *differently* than above, to mean a determinate manner in which something might be—in short, a way-of-being. For example, a sculptor is said to give a lump of clay the form of a man, and a certain object is said to have an accidental form, white or whiteness. Now one might say that what makes a subject an agent is the fact of its having the form, "non-inert" or "able to act". But then "form" is not meant as a dynamising principle at all, but as a way-of-being which the introduction of *F* (as above) was supposed to account for. To say that a subject is an agent insofar as it is able to act, or insofar as it exemplifies "able to act", is to say little (if anything) more than what "agency" means. But to say that a subject is an agent thanks to the immanent presence of some dynamising form, is to begin to move forward from a basic understanding or definition of agency, to a non-trivial *ontological derivation* of that agency. And to repeat, while form-as-predicate, *by definition*, quite clearly takes the subject in question as its *metaphysical* subject, it is far from clear that this is true of dynamising form also.

The distinction made earlier in this section, between a subject's capacity to operate and the dynamising principle "behind" this capacity, appears to be simply an instance of the distinction just made—between predicative form and dynamising form. To be empowered and able to act, is a way-of-being which is *predicated of* the agent in question. As shown above, it is hard to see what sense there could be in the proposition, "the subject's *way-of-being* (e.g. ability to act) does not take that subject as its metaphysical subject." By contrast, "the subject's *dynamising form* does not take that subject as its metaphysical subject" is not intrinsically contradictory or nonsensical. Such, at least, is the argument of this chapter.

The same analysis can easily be applied to *disposition*. It is hard to see how a subject *S* might *have* a certain disposition to act or behave in certain ways, without *being the metaphysical subject* of that disposition. The disposition in question is *predicated* of *S* and there appears to be no way around this. By contrast, something whose presence in *S* accounts for a certain disposition of *S*, need not be predicated of *S*. A theological example is appropriate here. If *caritas* is taken as a supernaturally given *disposition* to love as God loves—as a certain “quality of the soul”²⁴—one encounters an objection when calling this grace divine and uncreated—nothing uncreated and divine should be attributed to and predicated (even “accidentally”) of the creature (the supernatural elevation and so-called “divinisation” of the creature does not change this). But if *caritas* is understood to be the nature inherent to a *dynamising form*—or at least one aspect of that nature—the same objection does not apply. The dynamising form can be thought to be divine and uncreated, and this is compatible with saying that this form is infused by/as grace into the creature, such that the latter is now a *dynamical* possessor of divine charity.²⁵

6.4.1. Application: Divine Gift and Milbank’s Misreading of *Esse*

The Neoplatonic motifs that John Milbank retrieves (infusion, dynamical hierarchy, participation) involve this very “paradox”: lower beings receive, as their own, what remains “higher” and “other”, or “proper-to-another” (i.e. to God, the Good, or the One):

²⁴ “... donum gratiae qualitas quaedam est.” Aquinas, *ST* I-II. Q. 10 a. 2. Technically, for Aquinas, infused virtue and grace are not precisely the same. But that is of no consequence here, especially since there is no reason to deny that *caritas*, as a *habitus*, is also a *qualitas* of the same subject.

²⁵ Regarding the complex history of the distinction between created and uncreated grace in Catholic theology, see Alister E. McGrath, “The Concept of Grace” in *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), 128-38. Regarding Aquinas, see e.g. *ST* I-II. Q. 10 esp. a. 2, ad 3; and the references to *gratia gratis dans*; *gratia gratis data*; and *gratia gratum faciens* given in Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 467. See also pp. 217-222 (*gratia operans* is *forma supernaturalitatis* in the will according to Albert the Great); pp. 222-251 (Aquinas’s development of this view throughout his life). Without a detailed analysis of the relevant texts, it is hard to say to what extent the distinction I have made between predicative form and dynamising form, is operative in these reflections on grace.

The ruling principle of this philosophy or theology [Aquinas's use of *methexis*], which is derived directly from the Thomist real distinction [between *essentia* and *esse*], is the paradoxical 'superaddition of the most inward and essential,' in continuity with the ideas of the neoplatonist Proclus, who proclaimed ... that *the highest cause always works within things 'more inwardly' than lower causes.*²⁶

Since [in neoplatonism] the original 'thing' (Being, intelligence, soul, beauty, goodness, truth, unity, etc.) is fully received from the highest level by the lower levels according to their capacity for reception, it is *the very alien gift that becomes what is proper to these lower levels.*²⁷

While Milbank does not make such a distinction explicitly, it seems necessary to understand the gift which "proceeds" or is "infused" from a higher level to a lower one, as a *dynamising* form rather than as a *predicative* form. For example, if Milbank were to point to the creature's *disposition* to act in a divine manner, or to a certain *habitus* or *qualitas* inhering in the creature, and call this a "gift" from above, then "gift" would no longer be able to be understood *paradoxically*—as what is "alien" (proper-to-another, proper-to-the-giver) even as it is received (proper-to-the-recipient). By contrast, if the gift from above is understood as a dynamising form, then there are no such obstacles to thinking gift as "doubly proper" (I would suggest that this is the essence of gift, an essence which is obscured if one attends only to predicative form). What indwells the creature may well be *metaphysically* proper to a higher principle (and perhaps also dynamically proper to that principle, depending on whether it is allowed that the higher principle is able to act *immediately* also),²⁸ but it is *only* *dynamically* proper to the creature. Hence, the propriological distinction which seems

²⁶ Milbank, "The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek" in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233, here 204-5. My emphasis. He cites Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*. See also Milbank, "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics", 498. Compare with the comments in Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 88-89. The "superaddition of the most inward and essential" is considered also in John Milbank and Catherine Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001).

²⁷ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 90-91. My emphasis. See also the passage quoted in note 2 above.

²⁸ If the higher principle did not act, then how could it *give* its dynamising form to the lower, mediating agent?

necessary here (otherwise the paradox of the “doubly proper” collapses, leaving the fact of being “singly proper” on either side) cannot be performed on predicative form.

Following the first passage above (the one on Aquinas), Milbank claims that “the *esse* of God gives existence to everything and is the existence of everything, even though ‘existence’ is the enigma most proper to each separate reality.”²⁹ As already indicated,³⁰ this is not the position of Aquinas, who distinguishes the *esse* proper to the creature from that of God, so as to avoid collapsing the being of creatures into the divine being (or the reverse).³¹ (His solution was to affirm that creatures participate in *esse commune*, which included simply, all possible modalities of *created* being. This unity of being was not divine; it was not proper to any existing thing *at all*, since it was merely a “being of reason”).³² The problem is that Milbank has attempted to characterise the basic *actuality* (*actus essendi*) of the creature as a principle that is doubly-proper (“the *esse* of God ... is [also] the existence of everything”), contravening a logic that Aquinas rightly upholds (since God and creature are really distinct, the *esse* of one is different to the *esse* of the other).

Now if *esse* were *re-defined* to mean a dynamising form or immanent principle *giving rise to and accounting for* what it is different to³³—namely, the existence or primal actuality of that in which it abides—then thinking the creature’s *esse* as a *divine* gift as Milbank does, might well be compatible with the God-creature distinction so important to Aquinas. Given Milbank’s commitment to this distinction (see next paragraph), it is likely that this is his

²⁹ Milbank, “The Double Glory”, 205.

³⁰ See §2.9.1. above.

³¹ See, e.g. Aquinas, *ST I. Q. 3 a. 8*, “Whether God enters into the composition of other things?”; *ST I. Q. 3 a. 4 ad 1*; *SCG I. ch. 26*; *De Potentia Q. 7 a. 2 ad 4*.

³² See John F. Wippel, *The Metaphysical Thought of Thomas Aquinas: From Finite Being to Uncreated Being* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University Press of America, 2000), 110-23, esp. 115. See also Fran O’Rourke, *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); Rudi A. te Velde, *Participation and Substantiality in Thomas Aquinas* (Leiden: Brill, 1995); William Norris Clarke, “The Meaning of Participation in St. Thomas,” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994): 89-101; David C. Schindler, “What’s the Difference? On the Metaphysics of Participation in a Christian Context” in *The Saint Anselm Journal 3.1* (2005), 1-27.

³³ This difference is subtle—just as subtle as the difference between the term of a relation and the relation itself.

intention; his mistake is that he uses a term (*esse*) in way that contravenes its traditionally “predicative” nature or meaning.³⁴ This mistake is understandable, given that Milbank wants to think what is “most inward and essential” to the creature as a paradoxical gift. *Esse* is indeed a radically dynamising principle. The problem is that (i) *esse* is “radical” in a *predicative* way, and so *not* as an indwelling “other”, and that (ii) it is a “principle” of the basic actuality predicated of the existing creature, only in the sense that it already *is* that actuality, and so *not* in the sense of being an indwelling source of a distinct effect or result.³⁵

It is clear that it is *not* Milbank’s intention to identify God with creatures or even with the “world-soul”. In the first chapter of *Being Reconciled* (2003) Milbank opposes this understanding of divine immanence on the grounds that evil would then be read fatalistically into being as such (as opposed to being read as privation, in the manner of Augustine):

[S]ecularity will not see being as such as good and so will have to identify the Good in terms other than the full presence of the actual. The nearest one gets to such a secular theory is Spinoza, and later Nietzsche, but Spinoza still has an immanent God, and being and power remain convertible with the Good. Nonetheless, his immanentism means that evil in the cosmos, which is deficient weakness, is fated and inevitable, and in this way it would seem that evil does get lodged in being and privation is compromised, unless the perspectives of becoming have no true reality. One can conclude, therefore, that privation theory does require transcendence and creation *ex nihilo*.³⁶

³⁴ In Aquinas; Meister Eckhart’s use may well be different.

³⁵ David C. Schindler in “What’s the Difference?” does not make use of the distinction between dynamising form and predicative perfection. He is forced, then, to think *esse commune* as gift, and hopes that this merely notional entity can do real work in the world: “[T]he nonsubsistence of being not only *unifies* (i.e., because all things whatsoever outside of God participate in being) but at the *very same time liberates multiplicity*” (24). Schindler’s emphasis. “On the one hand, being, as the act of existence, is complete and simple; it is perfect ... On the other hand and at the very same time, however, Aquinas also affirms here [*De Potentia*, Q. 1, a. 1] that being . . . doesn’t exist!” (18). Hence “things do not participate directly in God in the sense that would make God in fact the being of things, [rather] creatures’ relation to God is mediated by *esse*; and at the same time, because *esse*, as non-subsistent, is *pure* mediation, we nevertheless can and must say that God’s relation to creatures is *immediate*: no *thing* between God and creatures ... Aquinas thus conceives of creation essentially in terms of participation *even though* he does not view it solely in the terms presented by the Platonic tradition” (19-20). Schindler’s emphasis.

³⁶ *BR*, 16-17.

Milbank is thus averse to the (for him, Gnostic) idea that history *necessarily* passes through evil:

The task here is to think through this paradox [the beginning-to-be of reconciliation must somehow belong eternally to God], without lapsing into idealist gnosis which ontologizes a necessary passage through evil.³⁷

‘[A] piety of the tragic’, like that of Donald MacKinnon, simply will not do, partly because it *still*, after all, *evades* the tragic, by hypostasizing it in speculative fashion ... Christianity refuses, having recognizes a universal tragic condition, to ontologize this ... Hence the story of the Fall, and to ontologize this story in the gnostic manner of Hegel and Schelling is to miss what here profoundly disturbs the entire project of ‘ontology’ itself. For without the Fall, or with the substitution of the notion of a necessary Fall, one starts with an irreducible scarcity and egotism, and the ethical becomes that which reacts to a bad situation which it is secretly in love with, and needs ceaselessly to reinstate, despite the fact that this compromises the very character of the ethical. Therefore one needs the myth of the Fall in order to think a genuine Good, which to be non-reactive can only be an original plenitude.³⁸

The broader picture here is that that Milbank favours a theo-ontology of original, Trinitarian peace,³⁹ and so is against any narration of the divine essence in terms of strife, “agonism”, “pain” or “violent rupture”. There is a German mystical tradition that posits such negativity in God, beginning with Jacob Böhme (“Boehme”), embraced by Schelling and then Hegel,⁴⁰

³⁷ *BR*, xii.

³⁸ *BR*, 149. Milbank’s emphasis.

³⁹ “Christianity ... recognizes no original violence. It construes the infinite not as chaos, but as a harmonic peace which is yet beyond the circumscribing power of any totalizing reason. Peace ... is the *sociality* of harmonious difference.” Milbank, *TST2*, 5. See also, in the same volume, “Ontological Violence or the Postmodern Problematic”, 278-326, and “The Other City: Theology as a Social Science”, 382-442. A basic theme of *BR* and “The Double Glory”—and of most of Milbank’s work, in fact—is the ontology of peace. David Bentley Hart concurs with this vision in *The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

⁴⁰ Milbank, “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek” in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233; here esp. 194-96; “For and Against Hegel” in *TST2*, 147-176. Milbank’s reading and critique of Hegel, and his understanding of Gnosticism, will not be assessed here. Influential on Milbank in this respect are three contemporary thinkers in particular—William Desmond, Cyril O’Regan and Gillian Rose. He cites Cyril O’Regan, *The Heterodox Hegel* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) and *Gnostic Return in Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), which develops and modifies the “Voegelin thesis”; Eric Voegelin, *Science, Politics and Gnosticism: Two Essays* (Washington, DC: Gateway, 1997). He says “Essentially the same line on Hegel as primarily Behmenist was already taken (with far less scholarly support) in my 1990 book *Theology and Social Theory*.” “The Double Glory”, 230n165. Milbank also cites Gillian Rose, *Hegel Contra Sociology* (London: Athlone, 1981). See also William Desmond, *Hegel’s God: A Counterfeit Double?* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). Another useful reference here is John W. Cooper, *Panentheism, the Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

and finding its way to contemporary German-speaking theologians such as Jürgen Moltmann⁴¹ and even the (relatively) conservative Swiss, Hans Urs von Balthasar.⁴² Milbank's polemic in *The Monstrosity of Christ* (2009), against the theology of Slavoj Žižek, is consistent with the position taken in *Being Reconciled* (2003). Here the Anglo-Catholic rejects (i) the idea that God essentially depends on the world, and (ii) the logically and historically related idea of divine contradiction:

[I]n the Godhead ... because of the presence of substantive relation, there is no dialectical *agon* whatsoever ... The tensional play is rather that of the dance—*perichoresis*, as the Greek Fathers said—and not of the sports field ... The logic of the Trinity does not then favour a solemn, serious, and tragic Teutonic shadowing of real history. Instead, it frivolously invokes a lost or hidden realm of fantastic pure play—which interrupts history only at one point, when somehow this light of the fantastic, as the light of the Nativity Star, manages to break through the natural-historical darkness that has demonically [and thus contingently!] concealed it from our view. Žižek, however, fails to be aware of this. He does not realize that the idea that the Father is the Father only in generating the Son through the procession of the Spirit is not first and foremost concerned with the 'seriousness' of a divine relationship to history ... [nor does it mean that] the Father is the Father only as the Father of the incarnate Jesus Christ. Yet the more genuine and yet lighter meaning of this idea is that God in himself is relationship, and therefore is love conceived of as an infinite exchange ... It might appear weightier, but is in reality more boring, to suppose that the Son first becomes the Son only in the Incarnation. This suggests a serious dialectical becoming of God as he descends into time. But with far greater levity [St. John and Paul disclose] not the dialectical identity of God but the eternally paradoxical existence of God as pure relationship, and as thereby able to enter into an absolute personal identity with finite createdness.⁴³

Milbank would therefore agree with many aspects of the Barthian critique of various neo-Hegelian theologies. According to Barth scholar, Paul D. Molnar, these take Karl Rahner's approach to the Trinity (the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and vice versa) in such a way as to make God's essential being depend problematically on world history. The

⁴¹ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

⁴² Milbank's critique is found in *The Suspended Middle*, 62-78. See also §2.9.2. above.

⁴³ Milbank, "The Double Glory", 186.

passage is Barthian also in its use of the notion of the *Logos asarkos* (the Word already exists eternally, as the second, divine person of the Trinity, independently of his incarnation in world history).⁴⁴

6.4.2. *Milbank versus Smith*

Comparing now Milbank and James K.A. Smith, these two theologians would not disagree when it comes to the question of whether the creature is a metaphysical subject for the capacity to operate (it can be assumed that their answer would be affirmative). But the propriological distinction should not be applied here precisely; it is hard to make sense of the idea that a creature's capacity to operate is "other", and is not a determination of that creature. Neither Smith *nor* Milbank claims that the creature has and "uses" God's capacity to operate. Nor would they disagree when it comes to the question of whether the formal principle of the creature's agency, is possessed by the creature in a *dynamical* sense (again: affirmative, though implicitly). Their disagreement, according to this retrieval, is actually over the metaphysical relation between this formal principle and the dynamical bearer of this principle. Both Milbank and Smith would attribute some innate tension or force or dynamism to the formal principle, but where Smith takes this principle to be *part* of the creature, Milbank understands the formal principle to be divine and *other* to the creature even as it is immanent in the creature by (medial⁴⁵) participation.

⁴⁴ See Paul D. Molnar, *Divine Freedom and the Immanent Trinity: In Dialogue with Karl Barth and Contemporary Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2002). For a *positive* take on the "historicization of the Trinity", see Michael J. Scanlon, "Trinity and Transcendence" in John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (eds), *Transcendence and Beyond: A Postmodern Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 66-81, esp. 69-72 (on "Rahner's rule"), and James P. Mackey, "Transcendent Immanence and Evolutionary Creation" in the same volume, 82-108. Scanlon cites Karl Rahner, *The Trinity*, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: Crossroad, 1977). For an excellent scholarly introduction to this problematic, see Wolfhart Pannenberg, "The World as the History of God and the Unity of the Divine Essence" in *Systematic Theology*, vol. I, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 327-336.

⁴⁵ Pertaining to mediation and the middle voice.

6.5. Thinking “Dynamical Possession” in Terms of Virtuality and Actuality

The propriological distinction proposed here is defined by two modes or senses of “possession” or “being-proper-to”. As for the definition of “ontic possession”, this is relatively straight forward: *S* possesses ontically whatever takes *S* as its metaphysical subject. Such an expression seems to resist further analysis, beyond specifying what “takes *S* as its metaphysical subject” means roughly (something like: is a component, determination or property of *S*). “Dynamical possession”, however, calls for more thought. In this section, a preliminary reading or explanation of this notion is offered, by invoking different modes of being or phases of actuality. This reading of dynamical possession is non-committal in respect to the propriological distinction (the latter is neither implied nor excluded).

Turning to Smith and Leibniz first, one can distinguish between two stages of actuality when it comes to the “force” component of the agent-monad. It would appear that the force enfolded into the body of the monad originally, could not possibly be *given* its tension by some act of the monad. For the innate tension of “force” is supposed to be sufficient in enabling the monad as an agent to begin with (this does not exclude the efficacy of God in endowing the monad with this force in the first place). The tension that already lies in (or which simply *is*) the force-component is the pre-supposition of the monad’s acting, and in *that* sense cannot be “actualised” by the monad. However, it does not seem problematic to say that on this basis, the monad *brings its force into expression*. On this evaluation, while the monad-agent cannot possibly be responsible for the primal tension of its force-component—or in other words, for its *own* virtuality or being-in-tension—it is responsible for the expressive actuality of its force. That is to say, the monad-agent brings itself (its virtuality) into expressive actuality, but is not responsible for the enabling presence of what it brings into expression. To hazard a definition, then: to say that the monad “dynamically”

possesses its force-component is to say that the monad is responsible for the expressive actuality of that force whenever it occurs (and for as long as it occurs, see below).⁴⁶

Positing a certain “dynamic interval” between virtuality and actuality, or between tension and expression, seems unavoidable here. It was just argued that an entity cannot bring into being that (tensile) state-of-affairs which is said to be the presupposition of its acting.⁴⁷ And yet if an entity cannot bring about a new⁴⁸ state-of-affairs in any sense—not even by mediating a higher principle—then it can hardly be called an “agent” (note again that immanent agency, not transitive agency, is the primary focus here). Taken together, these two observations lead one to conclude that there is one mode of being in the agent that the agent does not enact (since this mode of being is the presupposition, since it is/provides the dynamic origin, of its activity), and another mode of being that the agent does enact (or which *is* its activity). Such a difference is what is signified in the contrast between “virtuality *and* actuality” or between “tension *and* expression”.

Note that this “dynamic interval” was not arrived at by introducing a propriological distinction. This interval already appears once it is asked how it might be possible for an entity to act, where it is granted that the formal principle of its agency is an ontic component of that entity, as per the Smith/Leibniz paradigm. However, on the basis of this, one can usefully define “dynamical possession” more generally as follows. The dynamical possession of a formal principle of agency *F* by a creature *S*, denotes that *S* is responsible (in a sense that does not yet imply intelligence or freedom) for the actual expression of *F* in *S*, when such

⁴⁶ See §6.10. below.

⁴⁷ This is related to a well-known Scholastic principle. See David L. Schindler, “*Agere Sequitur Esse*: What Does It Mean? A Reply to Father Austriaco” in *Communio* 32 (2005), 795-824. “The plain meaning of the Thomistic axiom ... is that *agere sequitur esse* [he puts *sequitur* in bold]: acting follows—is thus (ontologically) *consequent upon*, and just so far *distinct* (not separate) *from*—being. On a proper reading of the Thomistic axiom, in other words, being is the *cause* of acting (even as being appears *in its acting*); and acting is the *effect* of being (even as it is *being* that acting manifests)” (804). Schindler’s emphasis. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Θ. 3, against the Megarian view that abilities exist only when they are in action.

⁴⁸ I do not mean unpredictable, or unprecedented.

occurs. From now on, “actuality” and “act” shall be used to denote only this “second stage” perfection for which the subject as agent is said to be responsible.

As promised, this formula is neutral as to whether F is taken as (1) an ontic component or as (2) an indwelling “other” instead. According to this formula, a creature can be said to be responsible for the expression of F without being responsible for the innate tension of F ; this does not change according to whether we think F ontically or non-ontically. Indeed, this general formula is even able to accommodate the case in which (3) F and S are really identical (at least if S is allowed to mean any agent, complex or simple). Thus it is allowed that even God is not responsible for the innate tension of his divine nature, by which he brings himself (eternally) into expression. Here God is still understood to possess dynamically the formal principle of his agency; this does not appear to conflict with the Thomistic claim that the formal principle of God’s agency is not really distinct from God,⁴⁹ not even in the weaker sense where F is an ontic *component*.

6.6. Agency: A Difficulty

Now regardless of whether F is understood to inhabit a particular agent S as (1) an ontic component, (2) an indwelling “other”, or (3) by being fully and really identical to S , the difficulty is in holding together the following “equation”. On one hand there is (a) the idea that S is responsible for its expressive actuality; on the other, (b) the idea that F sufficiently empowers this actuality (a given operation of S). The latter idea (b) is necessary from a dynamical perspective, for which a being’s capacity to operate is not a brute fact, but is rather to be accounted for in terms of some formal principle F in S (whether a non-ontic reading of F -in- S is embraced is another matter). A certain tension and fecundity is posited in F to

⁴⁹ For Aquinas, power and act in God are really the same. *ST I. Q. 25 a. 1, ad 2.*

account for the appearance of new states of being in *S* (again, this principle as such does not divide Smith/Leibniz from Milbank). The former idea (a) protects our appeal to *F* from sliding into the notion that *F*, of its own accord, proceeds into expression “naturalistically”—that nature (*F*) simply “takes over” in its subject *S*, such that *S* has no command or control over what actualities arise in it (out of *F*). That would mean that a certain sort of actuality—namely, “operation”—would not arise in the subject at all, since this by definition is self-enactment.

Repeating the first half of the equation: If the “nature” of *S* is taken purely in its etymologically original sense, as a principle in *S* that “gives birth”—putting aside the question of how *F* is to be understood (ontically or non-ontically) as well as any philosophical determination of *F* as being the nature of this or that sort of being—then the actual *naturing* that occurs in *S*, from out of its *F*, cannot be thought to “bypass” *S* on this account. Whenever a “birthing” of some actuality occurs in *S* out of *F*, this has to be seen as something for which *S* is responsible. But to return to the second half of the equation, the presence of *F* in *S* must still be seen to be *sufficient* in making *S* *able* to act. There is no point saying that *S* puts *F* into act using some dynamising principle other than *F*. For the question would then be, how does the subject put *this* form into act?⁵⁰

If to avoid infinite regress, it is necessary at some stage to account for how the subject puts form into act, without invoking another, supplementary form, one may as well do this at the beginning. For the sake of simplicity, then (and in the absence of any good reason for proceeding otherwise), the following situation will be excluded: *F* is mediated by a finite number of additional forms possessed dynamically by *S*, where only the last of these is put into act by the subject immediately. It will also make things simpler if another possibility is

⁵⁰ See §6.8.1. below.

put aside: that forms other than *F* can be superadded to *S*, thereby *increasing* and/or *focusing* the capabilities of *S*.

The outcome of questioning this difficulty further below, is the following proposal. What the subject *qua* subject yields or “offers” to expressible form, is itself as the hypostasis⁵¹ in which form is expressed; without this yielding, expressible form remains merely virtual, unexpressed. The dynamical possession of form can therefore be defined in terms of “expressive hypostasis”. The latter correlates with the “innate dynamism” of form—that dynamism for which, on this account, the subject cannot be responsible, since it is the formal principle of the subject’s agency. “Innate dynamism” is still ambiguous, however. The following clarification is therefore in order.

6.7. The “Innate Dynamism” of Form

There is one obvious sense of dynamism which is not *exactly* what is meant when it is said that the formal principle *F* is “innately dynamic” and thus the “dynamising principle” enabling *S* as an agent. “Dynamism” in the sense of “eventfulness” only holds true where something is actually *happening*—that is, where something is actively being produced, or where there is operation, actual movement, or interaction (this ready definition will suffice here). But the “dynamism” attributed to *F* as a principle of act, is not eventfulness or happening *per se*. It rather means a certain energetic fecundity (again, not fecundity in the sense of production, but in the sense of excessive *source* of whatever is produced), a certain loaded state of tension, whose *expression* is a happening, whose *releasement* is event. Hence *F* is taken to be the well-spring, the principle, of dynamism-in-the-sense-of-activity-or-eventfulness. To be sure, *F* need not be taken to be an *absolutely* originary and self-sufficient

⁵¹ I am assuming that the Greek term *hypostasis* means a local site, possessor or underlying subject of being.

well-spring; one might for instance posit *F* as an ontic component in the *creature S*. Arguably, if one were to do away with this *originary* sense of dynamism, one would only be able to admit that the way things are changes over time (perhaps even according to certain observable patterns or “laws”); no productive efficacy could be attributed to agents nor to formal principles in things.⁵²

Another sense of “dynamic” needs to be avoided also. Here “dynamic” is the opposite of something like “gentle and subtle”. In this sense a hot-blooded warrior is “dynamic” while a retiring, dreamy poet is not. However, it would be too quick, and unnecessarily restrictive, to associate the dynamic potential of form with just one tonality on the continuum from “soft” to “loud” (and such metaphors are necessary here). That would only distort our thinking of the power innate to form. Take, for instance, the expressible potential in love and in grace. These often move us, and are often expressed, gently and subtly.⁵³

6.8. “Responsibility” and the Yielding of Hypostasis

Consider again the “problem of agency”. If the dynamising form as such, had in itself *all* that it required to proceed into expression in its subject, then it could not be said that this subject is responsible for, in command of, the expressive realisation of that form. It would no longer make sense to call this subject, the *dynamical* subject (dynamical possessor) of the form in question. It seems necessary, then, to say that the expressible form must “wait upon” something from the subject if it is to be in act in that subject. However—and here is the difficulty—what the subject *qua* subject provides specifically cannot be (α) the act itself, nor

⁵² See Brian Ellis, *The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism* (Chesam: Acumen, 2002).

⁵³ For a dynamical reading of being in Thomas Aquinas, see William Norris Clarke, “Action as the Self-Revelation of Being: A Central Theme in the Thought of St. Thomas” in *Explorations in Metaphysics: Being—God—Person* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 45-64.

(β) another act to add to or support the act in question. Before proceeding to (γ) expressive hypostasis, the rationale for excluding (α) and (β) must be explained.

6.8.1. The subject as such does not provide a second act; the principle of act-identity

It will be easier to begin with (β). Why must the addition of act upon act be excluded? On the account followed in this chapter, the expressive act of the subject is empowered by some immanent form. But in order to accommodate empowerment-by-form, and thus the dynamical possession of form, it seems necessary to say that the subject's act is *really the same* as the expressive act of its empowering form. For to suppose that there is one act/actuality, that of the subject's *form* as such, and another act/actuality, that of the formally empowered *subject* as such—to think these as really distinct, and not simply logically distinct—this would only break up the dynamical unity between subject and form which seems to *define* the subject's "dynamical possession" of form. In other words, it would appear that *act-identity—non-distinction between the act of empowering form and the act of the subject—is just what the subject's "dynamical possession of form" means.*⁵⁴

In further support of this hypothesis (act-identity), its negation (act-duality) turns out to be rather implausible. It was hypothesised that the subject's expressible form must "wait upon" some *x* which the subject *qua* subject provides—that without *x* (whatever this might be),

⁵⁴ The principle of act-identity adopted here is adapted from a *similar* principle of Aristotle. In *Physica* and *De Anima* identity is affirmed between the act(uality) of the transitive agent and the act(uality) of the corresponding patient, while here, identity is affirmed between the act(uality) of the dynamic principle of immanent agency, and the act(uality) of the subject of that principle and agency. However, in neither case is it implied that the *meanings* or *definitions* of the two are the same. Aristotle understands transitive agency (an agent A being effectively at work in a patient B) to be really the same as the actuality (*energeia*) effected in the patient. "To be the operation [*energeia*] of A in B, and to be the operation of B by the agency of A, are different in definition" even though, materially, they are the same occurrence. *Physica* III. 2. 202^a15-^b25 [trans. E. Hussey (Clarendon Aristotle Series, 1983)]. For example, teaching and learning are the same event or process; the latter is understood differently depending on whether it is taken from the side of the giver (the teacher teaches) or from the side of the recipient of knowledge (the student learns). This is because "the activity of that which can act and produce movement takes place in that which is affected; for this reason it is not necessary for that which produces movement to be itself moved." *De Anima* III. 2. 426^a1-10 [trans. D.W. Hamlyn (Clarendon Aristotle Series, 1968).] Thus "the activity [*energeia*] of the object of perception and of the sense is one and the same, although what it is for them to be such is not the same." *De Anima* III. 2. 425^b25-30 [trans. Hamlyn]. Likewise, the actuality of the object of intellection, and the act of the intellect, are the same. *De Anima*. III. 5. 430^a20.

expressible form would remain merely virtual, not-yet-in-expressive-act (even if it is already tensely *ordered* toward act). The role of this hypothetical x is to prevent our positing of innate dynamism to imply a certain “automatism”, in which the subject’s form proceeds into act “automatically”, without the subject’s “doing”—a situation which is exactly contrary to the definition of “dynamical possession”. Now according to (β) act-duality, the x that the subject *qua* subject provides, is an act (A_2) really distinct from the expressive act of form (A_1). The question that arises at this point is, *what empowers* A_2 ?

Suppose there is (1) a dynamising principle other than the one introduced originally. The same line of questioning must now be repeated for this *second* dynamising form. Is there some x_2 that the subject provides so that *this* dynamising form is currently in act, but only with the subject’s “permission”, as it were? Neither the affirmative nor the negative response to this is acceptable. To (a) *affirm* the presence of x_2 would be fruitless. What is x_2 ? (i) Another act, A_3 ? Such leads to an infinite regress, which is absurd (for it is implied that one act of a subject consists of, or at least requires, an infinite number of acts in the same subject) and also pointless (no progress is ever made in accounting for dynamical possession). (ii) But if it is allowed that x_2 is *not* a distinct act, then one effectively concedes that there was no reason to posit A_2 (and with it, x_2) to begin with. To (b) *deny* the presence of x_2 would be equally fruitless—“automatism” is entailed then for *both* dynamising forms. If the second form effects A_2 without the subject’s “doing”, then A_2 has no role in preventing the first form from effecting A_1 without the subject’s “doing”.

However, having excluded (1), a *second* empowering form, one might attempt to think the empowerment of A_2 in terms of (2) the *same* form instead. But this changes nothing. In order to avoid (b) “automatism” in respect to A_2 (and A_1 in turn), one is forced to admit (a) that the subject *qua* subject provides x_2 , without which the same form does not effect A_2 . (i) To affirm that x_2 is another act A_3 , is again to take the path to infinite regress and make no progress at

all. (ii) But to deny that x_2 is another act is already to admit the possibility that x_1 is not a distinct act either, and this renders the appeal to A_2 redundant.

Finally, what if (3) A_2 is not empowered by *any* formal principle which the subject possesses dynamically (either there is *no* such principle at work anywhere, or the dynamising principle is only possessed by a *separate* agent)? In this case it could not be said that the subject *has the power to enact* A_2 . Again, A_2 would have no role in preventing the subject's form from effecting A_1 without the subject's "doing".

6.8.2. *The subject as such does not provide the same act*

If (β) is implausible (what the subject *qua* subject provides specifically is *another* act to add to or support the act in question), then perhaps what the subject provides is (α) the act itself. However, if there is but *one* act involved, then the provision of act is not proper or specific to the subject *qua* subject (whatever remains of the subject once form has been prescinded). The act is the self-expression of *form* no less than the operation of the *subject*. If the act is empowered by form, and if in accordance with this, there is act-identity, then it cannot be said that the subject provides act where by contrast the subject's form does not. It is not surprising, then, that attempting to define x in this way ends in triviality. To say that form is not released into act unless the subject "provides" that act (and a looser, *non-exclusive* sense is now required for "provides") is merely to re-iterate the thesis of act-identity, not to move toward an *account* of act-identity. The important questions remain unanswered. How does the subject manage to be empowered by its form, while also being in "command" of what empowers it? What makes the expression of form the same as an act *of the subject* also and not merely the act of form?

6.8.3. *The subject as such is, and provides, “expressive hypostasis”*

The method followed here, of course, is to look for the answer to such questions by asking another: What does the subject as such properly contribute to act? A promising response is as follows. (γ) The subject *S*, taken as subject precisely, is the *hypostasis*, the site, the “there” of *F*’s expression. *S* avails itself for the expressive virtuality of its *F* so that the latter comes into act (which according to act-identity is *also* to say: so that *S* comes into act). *S* “gives” itself to *F* as the *hypostasis* without which *F* (also *S*) cannot be in act. While *F* in itself (presuming its original unity with *S*) is sufficient to *enable* an act of *S* (it was agreed that no power needs to be added to *F* in order that *F/S* come into act), only the special union of *F*-as-power and *S*-as-hypostasis suffices for an act—this special union just *is* the act.

Note, however, that to say that *S* is “hypostasis” for *F* as above, is not yet to favour an ontic reading of this situation. For on this definition, *S* may well be the hypostasis for *F*’s expression, without also being the *metaphysical subject* of *F*. Thus to say that a creature *S* is hypostasis for an indwelling principle *F* which is (say) divine and therefore “other” to *S*, is perfectly in accordance with this definition of “hypostasis”. More precisely, then, *expressive hypostasis* is what is meant by “hypostasis” here, rather than *metaphysical hypostasis*. By the same token, this definition as such does not *exclude* the contrasting, ontic relation (where *F* is a real component of *S*, or even really identical to *S*).

The condition proposed above, for the responsibility of *S* in respect to the expression of *F*, can be defined more precisely as follows. *S* is responsible for the expression of *F*, just because *S qua S*—whatever is left in *S* when *F* is prescinded—*S* precisely gives the hypostatic component of the expression of *F* (note that the meaning of “giving” is extended here to allow for the giving *of* some principle in *S*, *by* some principle in *S*, *to* some principle in *S*). Thus, the actual expression of *F*, which is taken to be the same event as the act of *S*, is

understood to have two components, the formal and the hypostatic, such that *act occurs as the very union of these components*. The same event is at once the emanation of *F* as expressible energy (perhaps in a transitive motion through and *beyond S*, but that is not in question here), and *S*'s yielding to, giving itself as place for, the expressible tension of *F*.

In the next section it is argued that this active union between hypostasis and expressible form, presupposes some *pre-active* union between the two. Note also that the verb “to yield” is taken in a *non-productive* sense here, and is associated with “to surrender”, “to submit to the influence of” and “to give way to/for” (e.g. “he led the dance while she yielded to his promptings”; “he yielded to her love”; “the flower opened, yielding to the sunlight”; “the old floor yielded under the weight of the new piano”). This sense is distinct from, though related to, the productive sense (e.g. “the farm yielded much food for us this year”).

On this account, in short, dynamising form actually *takes* place (eventuates as expression) insofar as its subject actually *gives* place to form. Breaking the *one* act-event into these *two components* philosophically (what takes place, and what offers itself as place) proves fruitful. The introduction of *hypostasis*, as distinct from dynamising form, allows one to account reasonably for the subject's responsibility-for-act, in terms of its proper “contribution” to act. In the absence of this distinction, there appears to be no plausible candidate for a proper contribution. To say that the subject as such contributes *a whole act* is either circular if this is thought to be the same act as the one to be accounted for (and in any case, act is not proper to the subject abstracted from its dynamising principle), or against dynamical unity (act-identity) if this is thought to be a separate act.

The remainder of this chapter adds more detail to the account of dynamical possession offered above. First, an argument is given for the necessity of a pre-active union between subject and form. Second, it is claimed that the yielding of the subject to its form is an

instance of *energeia*, not *kinesis*. On this basis, third, the subject is understood to be “ever-givable” in relation to its form. Finally, a privative sense of virtuality is excluded.

6.9. Active and Pre-active Union

Act-identity dictates that the “giving” of *S* as hypostasis for expressible form, *is* the act itself as seen from the side of *S*, while from the side of *F* the same act is the actual “taking” of *S* by *F*. The act, then, is a sort of “bilateral” union between a dynamising form and its subject—form “claims” the subject as its site of its expression, and properly “takes hold” there only as the subject gives way. The same insight can be put negatively. If, hypothetically, some form were able to appropriate a subject, and come to full expression “in” that subject, without the latter’s giving way from its side, then the expression of form would represent a merely “unilateral” union between form and subject. In that case, the form’s being “in” that subject would have to be understood in a rather weak sense that excluded dynamical possession (one might then question whether it would still make sense to speak of a “being-in”; the applicability of “subject” and “expression” might also be put in question).

Now one might be tempted to exclude unilateral union between form and subject *altogether*, in order to uphold the principle of act-identity. That is, one might think that there can *only* be bilateral union between a subject and the form possessed dynamically. However, it is one thing to exclude the situation in which there occurs *only* unilateral union, and another thing to exclude the situation in which there occurs *any* unilateral union. *Only the former* is implied by the claim made in the previous paragraph—that if some form were able to come to full expression “in” its subject without the latter’s giving way, there would occur a merely unilateral union in which form is active while the subject is not, which would indicate that the form is not dynamically possessed by the subject after all. For to say that (1) the expressive act of a dynamically possessed form requires, since it really coincides with, the giving way of

the subject—which is to say, *bilateral union*—is not yet to say that (2) the dynamical possession of form *consists* in the bilateral union between form and subject and therefore excludes the occurrence of merely unilateral union.

The point to made here is not that the same form might be actively expressed “in” the same subject in two entirely different ways—as bilateral union and *also* as unilateral union with the subject (if indeed this rather awkward situation *is* a possibility); such is not the motivation for choosing (1) over (2). Rather, the point is that equating (i) the *act* of a dynamically possessed form with (ii) bilateral union between form and subject, still leaves open the question of whether this form is present in its subject *just insofar as it is in expressive act there*. For there may well be some *pre-active* or *pre-expressive* presence of a form in a subject which possesses that form dynamically, and it is conceivable that this occurs as a *unilateral* union, to which the subject’s activity does not contribute.⁵⁵

In fact, it can be argued that the active union that holds between a form *F* and its subject *S* while the latter yields itself as hypostasis, *cannot possibly* be their first and only union. Suppose that *F* first came to inhabit *S* in the actual yielding of *S* to *F*. What options are now available in thinking *F* as that which enables *S* as an agent? Once the possibility of *non-active* union is excluded, one must consider *F* either (a) in its active union with *S*, or (b) apart from *any* union. Neither of these approaches seems acceptable. Option (a) amounts to the following. *S* has the capacity to act on account of the empowering presence of *F* in *S*, where inversely, this empowering presence holds on account of the act of *S*. But it is hard to see how the sudden appearance of act in a subject could be attributed to that subject, and thus be called an operation, if this were not the realisation, in and by that subject, of a capacity to

⁵⁵ This is essentially the same point as that made in §2.8.1. above, in respect to the middle voice. I do not pretend that this “two-stage” theory is completely novel. Its theological precedent is the Scholastic distinction between operative and co-operative grace. See note 25 above.

operate which was *already held* by that subject.⁵⁶ Or, if one denies that some *temporal* lag is required between the having of a capacity and its enactment: it is hard to see how the capacity to operate could hold in a subject on account of the subject's operation using that capacity. If the indwelling of *F* is supposed to account for the subject's capacity to operate, then presumably, this indwelling should be thought as holding true *independently* of any ensuing activity (even if this indwelling is intelligible only with reference to the ensuing activity).

What, then, of option (b)? Is it possible to account for a subject's capacity to operate by appealing to *F apart* from any union that it might have with the subject? Is it reasonable to suppose that *F* accounts for a subject's capacity to operate even without being present *in* that subject as an empowering principle? It seems not. If a certain formal principle, considered *directly and in itself*, accounted for a subject's capacity to operate, then it would have to be said that the subject will have that capacity regardless of whether or not the form in question is dynamically united with (dynamically possessed by) that subject. This lack of discrimination in the appeal to *F* is absurd, and would also affect one's thinking of every other subject. If one admitted that *F as such* (rather than *F as dynamically united with S*) accounted for something in *S* (its capacity to operate) then one would also have to admit that it would account for something (a capacity to operate) in *every other* real entity one might consider—even those that have no such capacity, and those of a completely different nature.

In light of the problems attending (a) and (b), it seems far more reasonable to understand the subject's dynamical possession of form in terms of a *pre-active* union between the two—the form's being-*in* the subject with an immanence⁵⁷ which is already the empowerment of the subject, and which holds true independently of whether the subject is giving way to form or

⁵⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Θ. 3, against the Megarian view that abilities exist only when they are in action.

⁵⁷ Ontic or non-ontic.

not. On this account, a subject is already expressive hypostasis for expressible form *prior* to the act in which it yields itself as expressible hypostasis for form. However, this does not entail that our knowledge of virtuality precedes our knowledge of expressive act, nor that expressive act occurs for the sake of virtuality rather than the reverse. Expressive act might have epistemological and teleological primacy, even though it is posterior to virtuality in the order of efficiency as just explained. Hence the *prevenient* dynamical possession of *F* need not be seen as the subject's *perfect* possession of *F*. (The latter, in fact, is plausibly associated with the expressive union of *F* and *S*. For it is likely that *F*'s active penetration of *S*, or in other words *S*'s actual yielding to *F*, is more intensely a union. That is not to say that expressive act makes the subject more perfectly *empowered* by form, however).⁵⁸

A final point: one must take care in thinking “pre-” (in “pre-active”) and the two “stages” of union. For there does not seem to be any problem with saying that active union builds upon and so *includes* pre-active union, where pre-active union as such has no need of active union in order to hold true, although it is ordered toward the latter.⁵⁹ At the least, this “inclusive” understanding of antecedence—pre-active union is an *antecedent and ongoing* condition for active union—should not be excluded too quickly. At the most, it would be against the account of act given in this chapter, to adopt an “exclusive” sense of “pre-“ and “after”—to assume that expressive act could, in principle, occur or begin at time T_n as an effect of the

⁵⁸ For Aristotle, actuality precedes potentiality in knowledge and in purpose. *Metaphysica* Θ. 8. However, supposing that virtuality is prior in terms of efficiency (actuality “arises from” virtuality), as I do, is contrary to Aristotle’s view. “But if there is something which is capable of moving things or acting on them, but is not actually doing so, there will not be movement; for that which has a capacity need not exercise it. Nothing, then, is gained [in accounting for the appearance of motion] even if we suppose eternal substances, as the believers in the Forms do, unless there is to be in them some principle which can cause movement; even this is not enough, nor is another substance besides the Forms enough; for if it does not *act*, there will be no movement. Further, even if it acts, this will not be enough, if its substance is potentiality; for there will not be *eternal* movement; for that which is potentially may possibly not be. There must, then, be such a principle, whose very substance is actuality.” *Metaphysica* Λ. 6. 1071^b12-20. Translator’s emphasis. “It [God, the first mover] produces motion by being loved, and it moves the other moving things. Now if something is moved it is capable of being otherwise than as it is...but since there is something which moves while itself unmoved, existing actually, this can in no way be otherwise than as it is.” Λ. 7. 1072^b2-9. “One actuality always precedes another in time right back to the actuality of the eternal prime mover.” Θ. 8. 1050^b1-5. [trans. W.D. Ross, revised J. Barnes (Revised Oxford Aristotle, 1984)].

⁵⁹ See also §6.12. below.

empowering presence of form, *where this presence held up until time T_{n-1} and no further*. For then, against act-identity, expressive act would not be understood as an actuality of dynamically possessed *form*, as well as an actuality of the subject.

6.10. Yielding as *Energeia*, not *Kinesis*

In this section and the following, “giving” rather than “yielding” is referred to, for the simple fact that “givable” and “being given” are easier expressions when compared with “yieldable” and “being yielded”.⁶⁰ On this account, for a subject *S* to be in act by the power of *F*, is for *S* to be *actually given* as expressive hypostasis for the current expression of *F*. Such *actual* givenness (being-given) is distinct from the mere *givability* that hypostasis has in relation to the form it bears. The former is associated with the expressive union of *F* and *S*, the latter with their pre-active or pre-expressive union. Hence the givenness (being-given) of hypostasis to expressible form, is the very continuance of the expressive actuality of form. For that reason this same actuality is also the actuality of the subject in question.

Now it would appear that the fact of being actually given to expressible form, should not be thought to hold true in the subject as if it were something achieved or produced *as the end-result of a becoming*. The standing-complete of a constructed house is an example of an actuality that appears and endures temporally *after* an actualisation (the process of building); this actualisation is by definition *kinesis* (a becoming). But it would be inappropriate to think the givenness of hypostasis to expressible form in such a way. The house is finished insofar as it is *no longer* being built (presuming such building proceeded through to the end); to think the givenness of the subject to form in such kinetic terms would mean that *hypostasis is actually given to expressible form insofar as it is no longer being yielded—no longer yielding*

⁶⁰ My choice of the terms “givable” and “being given” was influenced by Jean-Luc Marion, but I do not necessarily want to impose here the specific understanding of “givability” and “being given” found in his *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, trans. Jeffrey L. Kosky (Berkeley: Stanford University Press, 2002), esp. 136-8.

itself. But such would mean the destruction of the dynamical union between form and subject, according to which form's expression is the same as the subject's yielding itself and releasing form into expression.

In other words, if the subject “made” itself, in respect to its expressible form, given-once-and-for-all, similarly to how a builder makes a building stand on its own and so no longer builds, the subject would no longer be that upon which the expression of form “waits”. To be sure, here the subject might be said to be responsible for the “initialising” of this situation. But this is not enough to insure that the expression of form is genuinely the operation of the subject for as long as such expression occurs (noting that “expression” means “expressing” and not merely some product that stands complete, a finished term of the act of self-expression needing expressive act no longer). To agree only that the subject must *initialise* a continual expression, by yielding itself “once and for all”—rather than having to yield itself in the mode of continually yielding, thus accounting *in* every moment *for* every moment of its givenness—this is to imply that the expression of form continues either as (1) an inert (though previously actualised) fact, or (2) as an ongoing activity that is not, however, the ongoing activity *of the subject*. Neither option is a fitting interpretation of the expressive actuality of some form dynamically one with its subject. Therefore the self-yielding of the subject as expressive hypostasis, is best understood as *energeia* (an actuality whose perfection consists in being continually actualised) rather than *kinesis* (a becoming after which some actuality stands complete without ongoing actualisation).⁶¹ However, this is not to say that the subject does not undergo *kinesis* in some other respect, even as a result of the *energeia* in question.

⁶¹ “For every movement [*kinesis*] is incomplete ... for it is not true that at the same time we are walking and have walked, or are building and have built, or are coming to be and have come to be—it is a different thing that is being moved and that has been moved, and that is moving and that has moved; but it is the same thing that at the same time has seen and is seeing, or is thinking and has thought. The latter sort of process, then, I call an actuality [*energeia*], and the former a movement [*kinesis*].” Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Θ. 6. 1048^b25-34 [trans. W.D. Ross, revised J. Barnes (Revised Oxford Aristotle, 1984)].

6.11. The “Ever-Givable” Subject

On this basis one can determine more clearly the sense in which the subject is “givable” in relation to its expressible form (thanks to pre-active union). First, it can be said that the empowered subject is *not* able to give itself to expressible form. The subject cannot avail itself “once and for all”, cannot hand itself over to its form in such a way that no more yielding is required. The subject cannot modify itself in such a way that it is now *structurally* given to its form, where such structural givenness would do away with the need to keep actually giving. Also, the subject cannot simply “declare” itself given so that from now on its givenness need not occur in the mode of continual *act*. Now this *inability* of the inhabited subject, to give itself up to its form “once and for all”, can in fact be seen as the condition of its *ability to give itself continually*. Put negatively, if the subject *could* finally give itself, then it would not be the prerogative of the subject to give itself *continually*. Hence there is a certain *non-givability* (in respect to giving once-and-for-all) which is essential to the subject’s *givability* (in respect to giving always). One might summarise this by saying that the expressive subject of some dynamising form is “ever-givable” in respect to that form. With this the meaning of dynamical possession is determined further.

6.12. Against a Privative Sense of Virtuality

The dynamism which has been attributed to form essentially and definitively, is a certain *tendency* to be expressively actual (*in* the subject, *as* the subject’s expressive actuality), where this tendency is taken to include the power to bring about this “preferred” situation of being-in-act (as the subject yields). If the presence of form in a subject is supposed to account for the presence of dynamism and for the subject’s capacity to operate, then it is likely that form’s potent tendency-toward-act is the very being of form, rather than an accidental determination that form may or may not receive (it is another question whether non-divine

forms must be given their being by God to begin with). On this account, then, *the being of form is virtuality*. (Note, however, that such “virtuality” is not meant to indicate the tendency of an essence to rise into separate existence from out of the being or mind of God. For on this account “form” is always understood to be the real form *of an existing subject*.) Now it can be argued that such “virtuality” cannot be simply the privation of actuality. If the being of form were just the privation of actuality, it would follow that form has no virtuality once it is in expressive act.⁶² But this implies that form-in-act means the non-existence of this same form (by adhering to the definition: the being of form is virtuality), which is problematic.⁶³

6.13. Conclusion

It appears that “dynamical possession”, and therefore the propriological distinction (the subject of this second stage of the thesis), can be made more intelligible by (1) introducing another distinction between *dynamising* form (which can be immanent in a subject as an indwelling “other” and gift) and *predicative* form (an act, quality, shape, perfection or property that is always *of its* subject in the ontic/metaphysical sense), (2) thinking dynamising form in terms of the “dynamic interval” between innate virtuality and actuality, and (3) thinking the dynamical subject as the “expressive hypostasis” that yields to dynamising form as the latter rises into expressive act. It may well prove fruitful to think gift and participation in these terms explicitly. The next chapter builds further upon this vision (thus completing stage two), and is concerned with the relation between virtuality and actuality.

⁶² I have made this situation simpler by assuming that form is either totally in act or in virtuality-but-not-act.

⁶³ See Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Θ. 6. 1048^a30-^b10 for the claim that actuality and potentiality cannot be defined except by example and analogy. I have not broached the question of whether *dunamis* (potentiality) in Aristotle, in at least some of its occurrences, is identical to my “virtuality”.

7. Virtuality

7.1. Introduction

In this chapter it is argued that virtuality is primary, against the Thomistic primacy of act which states that “whatever is in potentiality cannot be reduced into actuality except by some being in actuality”. It is also argued that this is the position of John Milbank, despite appearances to the contrary.¹ This chapter fits into the overall thesis as a deepening of our understanding of dynamical possession (in dialogue with Aquinas and Milbank), and thus as a final development of the propriological distinction (dynamical/expressive versus ontic/metaphysical possession). At the beginning of stage two of the overall argument, which this chapter finalises, this distinction was introduced in order to account for the possibility of *plural possession*. The latter was itself offered as the condition for gift-exchange and participation (stage one of the argument).

7.2. The Sufficiency of Pre-Motion

In the previous chapter, a distinction was made between the virtuality which holds in (dynamising) form essentially, and the expressive actuality of that form. However much this account of power and agency draws upon principles found in Aristotle and Aquinas, it does not require that actuality is absolutely primary as it is for these two thinkers.² Consider the following passage of Thomas Aquinas:³

... the First Being must of necessity be in act, and in no way in potentiality. For although in any single thing that passes from potentiality to actuality, the potentiality is prior in time to the actuality; nevertheless, absolutely speaking, actuality is prior to potentiality [*simpliciter*]

¹ This chapter does not deal with the primacy of the possible in Heidegger, except in passing. See note 36 below.

² For Aristotle, actuality precedes potentiality in knowledge and in purpose, as well as “absolutely”. See *Metaphysica* Θ. 8.

³ Aristotle’s theology of the divine first cause, which is unmoved, and moves by being loved, is found at *Metaphysica* Λ. 7. 1072^a34-^b14. There are important differences between Aristotle and Aquinas in their arguments for the divine first cause.

tamen actus prior est potentia]; for whatever is in potentiality can be reduced into actuality only by some being in actuality [*quia quod est in potentia, non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu*]. Now it has been already proved that God is the First Being. It is therefore impossible that in God there should be any potentiality [or more precisely, something *in* potentiality, *aliquid in potentia*].⁴

According to this argument, every transition from potentiality to actuality must be accounted for by the effective (“reductive”) presence of some entity in act (*ens actu*). If ever (temporally, or even “logically”⁵) there were some potentiality in God, the actualisation of that potentiality would have to be the work of some other entity which is already in act, and this is impossible if God is the First Being (*Deus est primum ens*). (Dividing God into an essentially actual component, and a not-essentially-active component which the former somehow “reduces” into act, would be against the simplicity of God thematised in *ST* I. Q. 3—and would mean accepting the primacy of actuality anyhow). It follows that the actuality which holds true of God could not possibly have been brought *into* act by God (let alone by anything else) at any “stage”, temporal or logical.

In short, for Aquinas, nothing precedes the actuality which holds true in God eternally—neither “potentiality” nor “virtuality”. Otherwise—because of the supposed impotence of potentiality as such in reducing itself into act—it would be impossible for the potentiality in creatures to ever be actualised, whereas creatures do in fact act on the basis of their native powers. However, the ambiguity of *potentia* requires attention here. To say that it is impossible that God might have been in potentiality (*in potentia*) in some way, is not to say that God has no power (*potentia*):

⁴ “... quia necesse est id quod est primum ens, esse in actu, et nullo modo in potentia. Licet enim in uno et eodem quod exit de potentia in actum, prius sit potentia quam actus tempore, simpliciter tamen actus prior est potentia: quia quod est in potentia, non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu. Ostensum est autem supra quod Deus est primum ens. Impossibile est igitur quod in Deo sit aliquid in potentia.” *ST* I. Q. 3 a. 1. English Dominican translation used (my emphasis, and final addition in square brackets), accessible at www.newadvent.org/summa

⁵ In the sense that the existence of the Father is traditionally said to be *presupposed* by the generation of the Son, without this implying that there is a *time* at which the Son is not. *ST* I. Q. 27 aa. 1-2.

... power is twofold—namely, passive, which exists not at all in God; and active, which we must assign to Him in the highest degree ... God is pure act, simply and in all ways perfect, nor in Him does any imperfection find place. Whence it most fittingly belongs to Him to be an active principle, and in no way whatsoever to be passive. On the other hand, the notion of active principle is consistent with active power. For active power is the principle of acting upon something else; whereas passive power is the principle of being acted upon by something else, as the Philosopher says ... It remains, therefore, that in God there is active power in the highest degree.⁶

Of course, one cannot do justice to Aquinas's thought on operation by attending to these passages alone.⁷ However, it is still possible to question the validity of the principle by which Aquinas attempts to prove that God is completely and essentially in act, and then to question the coherence of such a view of God.

To repeat, the principle in question is as follows: whatever is in potentiality cannot be reduced into actuality except by some being in actuality (*quia quod est in potentia, non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu*). It is clear that *ens actu* in this passage does not mean simply an *existing* entity. For that would still allow that an existing being whose power is not in act, *is* able to reduce itself into act, whereas the point of the argument is to prove the opposite. The *potentia* in question is more than just *posse* in respect to existence; the purpose of the argument is not to prove the rather self-evident truth that something that does not exist cannot bring itself into existence.

⁶ “Respondeo dicendum quod duplex est potentia: scilicet passiva, quae nullo modo est in Deo, et activa, quam oportet in Deo summe ponere. Manifestum est enim quod unumquodque, secundum quod est actu et perfectum, secundum hoc est principium activum alicuius: patitur autem unumquodque, secundum quod est deficiens et imperfectum. Ostensum est autem supra quod Deus est purus actus, et simpliciter et universaliter perfectus; neque in eo aliqua imperfectio locum habet. Unde sibi maxime competit esse principium activum, et nullo modo pati. Ratio autem activi principii convenit potentiae activae. Nam potentia activa est principium agendi in aliud: potentia vero passiva est principium patiendi ab alio, ut Philosophus dicit, V Metaphys. Relinquitur ergo quod in Deo maxime sit potentia activa.” *ST I*. Q.25 a. 1. English Dominican translation.

⁷ See Bernard Lonergan, “St Thomas's Theory of Operation” in *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 66-93; *ibid.*, “Procession and Related Notions” in *Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas*, eds. Frederick E. Crowe and Robert M. Doran (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 106-51.

Now the problem with this principle is that it seems to imply that potentiality and power are in every case *essentially impotent*. That is, the principle appears to be incompatible with (immanent) agency. What sense is there in attributing the power of agency to an entity, while also denying that the entity endowed with such power is thereby enabled to bring *itself* into a respective act? In defence of Aquinas, it might be said that the principle in question does not deny that created agents bring themselves into act; it implies only that their self-enactment presupposes not just their possession of power but the effective movement of that power by God, who is pure act. However, it must still be asked what God contributes *operatively* to the agent's movement (i.e. prior to and independently of the created agent's concession to being-moved) as opposed to what God effects in the agent *co-operatively* (i.e. in and through the agent's *self*-movement). It is clear that God cannot *operatively* effect the operation of the agent. For it is impossible, even for God, to cause *immediately* (operatively, unilaterally) in another being an *operation*, since the latter, by definition, is *self*-movement or *self*-enactment. The most that God could effect operatively, in moving a created agent to its *own* operation, is a certain *pre*-motion in the creature, it would seem.⁸ And what could this pre-motion be except a certain state of virtuality and readiness-to-act?

In fact, it appears that the presence of such pre-motion/virtuality in the creature would have to be a *sufficient condition* in respect to that creature's empowerment—assuming that God effects the creature's operation mediately, through pre-motion, as just argued. Suppose that

⁸ It is possible that my understanding of “pre-motion” is, in *one* respect, closer to that of the late 16th Century Spanish Dominican, Domingo Bañez. “[T]he Bannezian premotion is constituted by a greater actuation of the agent; it gives the created agent a special participation of the pure act of being; and it tends to identify this special participation with an anti-Aristotelian and anti-Thomist *actio in agente*. On the other hand, the Aristotelian premotion as understood by St Thomas affects indifferently mover or moved, agent or patient; explicitly it is *vel ex parte motive vel ex parte mobilis* [either on the side of the motive force or on that of the movable. *In VIII Phys.*, lecture 2, §976; see also §978], and what it brings about is not some special participation of absolute being but, again explicitly, some relation, disposition, proximity that enables mover to act upon moved.” Longeran, *Grace and Freedom*, 74. See also pp. 370-73. On the other hand, the use of “pre-motion” by Bañez and certain “older Thomists” (Garrigou-Lagrange in particular) is associated with a certain theory of grace which is at odds with (and indirectly critiqued by) the understanding of pre-motion offered in this section. On the Bannezian account, “sufficient” grace (a pre-motion) is in fact *not* sufficient for an operation; there must also be “efficient grace”. See William G. Most, *Grace, Predestination, and the Salvific Will of God: New Answers to Old Questions* (Front Royal, VA: Christendom Press, 1997), §77-144, esp. §119-121, §129.

pre-motion were essentially *insufficient*—that for every creature there could be no state of pre-motion (being pre-moved) which would suffice in making it able to act. It must then be asked: What might be added to pre-motion so as to effect a sufficiently enabling condition in the subject? An extra pre-motion? Not if it is agreed that pre-motion is essentially insufficient. (The same point can be put differently. If one admits that a “double” or “multiple” or “complex” pre-motion is sufficiently enabling, one might as well admit that a single pre-motion is sufficiently enabling). Now there is no middle term between pre-motion and actual motion.⁹ But it is incoherent to say that *actual motion* given to a creature (more precisely, the actuality which was supposed to be the creature’s operation) is what makes it able to act.¹⁰ For this would mean that God effects operatively the creature’s operation, which is against the definition of operation as self-enactment, and makes the operation of the creature the condition of possibility of its operation, which is also problematic. There seems to be no way around the following conclusion, then. If pre-motion in a subject does not suffice to make it able to act, then nothing suffices, and there are no agents (or at least, no created agents). If there *are* created agents whose proper operations are somehow caused efficiently by God, and if this causation proceeds by way of pre-motion as argued above, then this causation must occur through the imparting of (instances of) *sufficiently enabling* virtuality/pre-motion.

Now it is hard to see how the sufficiency of pre-motion could possibly be reconciled with the principle in question (only a being in act can reduce potentiality into act), even if that principle were understood to allow *co-operative* reduction by another (not just *unilateral* reduction by another). Suppose that a secondary agent, already pre-moved by God (the

⁹ “Motion” need not be taken in the stricter sense of *kinesis* or gradual change. But even if it were, there would still be no middle term between pre-motion and actual motion.

¹⁰ To suppose that God effects operatively a motion in the creature *besides* the operation in question, is not promising as an account of how God empowers the *operation in question*.

primary agent), now also puts itself into act. There are two possibilities to consider here; only the first seems acceptable. (1) From virtuality/pre-motion *alone*, there arises activity and “full motion”. This is not to say that the presence of virtuality/pre-motion in the agent is without cause. Nor is it to say that the agent’s activity can occur while the antecedent cause(s) are not *currently* at work, as if only *previous* causation of pre-motion were required. Rather, it is to say that the transition from potentiality to actuality in the agent is *purely* a transition from pre-motion/virtuality to act—that the potentiality which is somehow “reduced” into actuality (operation),¹¹ is *entirely* pre-motion/virtuality. But this does not imply that pre-motion/virtuality is not brought into being, even actively upheld in being, by an external cause, perhaps from a state of *non-virtual*¹² potential in the creature-agent. As for the “reduction” in question, however, this by definition *presupposes* pre-motion and takes the latter as its “matter”, as it were; it should not be understood to *effect* such pre-motion to begin with. Now if the starting point (in the subject being reduced) of the reduction into actuality (i.e. into operation) is pre-motion *alone* as (1) dictates, then it is impossible that this reduction be effected by another agent unilaterally, either wholly or partially. For the starting point of unilateral movement from without, is not pre-motion; it is rather “mere potential” (i.e. potential that is not pre-motion).

Alternatively, (2) perhaps activity and “full motion” do *not* arise purely from virtuality/pre-motion. Three options will be considered here, (a) to (c); none of these appears to be acceptable. What if (a) the same state-of-affairs and starting point *X* in the subject is simultaneously (i) pre-motion, in respect to which it can be said that the subject puts itself into act, and (ii) mere potential, in respect to which it can be said that the subject is reduced

¹¹ The movement or transition into actuality need not be thought to be something other than the act(uality) itself, just as putting oneself into act is likely to be the same as acting.

¹² Non-virtual in respect to the virtuality which is then effected, and which is the basis of the act in question, but not necessarily *absolutely* non-virtual.

into act by God, operatively? Taking this path might work if it is said that, if *X* is to be actualised, it must be reduced into act *in both ways at once*. (If it is allowed that the subject can put itself into act without the operative reduction of God, then the principle in question is denied anyhow. If it is allowed that God can put the subject into act without the subject also putting itself into act, then the effected act is no longer operation. By negating both of these, one is left with the double-sided movement or reduction just mentioned.) But if pre-motion is sufficiently enabling as agreed, then presumably, it could be released into act by its subject even when it is not being reduced into act from without. One would expect that it is possible for a sufficiently enabled agent to put itself into act even in the absence of an appropriate externally *reducing* cause, even if not in the absence of an appropriate externally *pre-moving* cause. Moreover, it is hard to see how the same starting point in the same subject in relation to the same ensuing act, could be wholly pre-motion in one respect, and wholly “mere potential” in another respect.

Perhaps (b) the antecedent potentiality is partly pre-motion, and partly not—not in the sense of hovering somewhere in between (for there seems to be no middle term here either, and it was agreed that pre-motion must be sufficiently empowering anyway) but in the sense of being composed of two parts, one of which is pre-motion, the other of which is not. But assuming it is possible to make sense of this unpromising solution, this too requires that both “parts” of the subject’s potential are reduced/actualised together (otherwise, again, one is presented with the choice between a subject that simply puts itself into act, and a subject that is simply put into act from without) and this too seems to contradict the sufficient empowerment of the subject. Finally, there is (c) the subject’s actuality begins from a starting point which is purely “mere potential”. This can be immediately discounted, on the grounds that operative/unilateral movement from without cannot effect operation (self-enactment) in the thing moved.

In sum, it appears that the sufficiency of pre-motion in a subject *S* cannot be reconciled with the claim that an externally reducing principle *E* is at work in the transition from potentiality to act in *S*. If the reductive work of *E* is operative (unilaterally efficient), then there is the dual problem of squaring this with the *self*-reduction of the *sufficiently enabled* subject from pre-motion into act. If the reductive work of *E* is co-operative (mediated by pre-motion), then either *E* works entirely through pre-motion (which amounts to (1) above, except that an extra pre-motion is posited in the subject, redundantly) or it does not. In the latter case, there is the dual problem of squaring the *operative component or aspect* of the work of *E*, with the self-reduction of the sufficiently enabled subject.

These difficulties are avoided if the effect of the externally efficient principle (assuming there is one) is restricted in its range in accordance with (1) above, as follows (for the sake of simplicity, and in continuity with traditional inquiry, it is assumed that this principle is God). In the transition from pre-motion into act (operation) in a subject *S*: (i) God as *external* cause is at work in giving *S* pre-motion, but not in reducing that pre-motion into act; (ii) if the giving of pre-motion involves the infusion of divine form, and therefore the dynamical possession of divine form by *S*, then there may be a sense in which God as *immanent* cause is at work in giving *and* actualising pre-motion, though the latter will occur only with (and as) the subject's concession.

It is important to note that (ii) does not allow that divine form is already in full act—as least not with an act which is also the act of *S*—when it is considered simply as dynamically possessed by *S*. For, according to this understanding of dynamical possession, the subject *S* is “responsible” for the expressive actuality in *S* of its dynamising form (but not for the virtuality that precedes this), and this requires that the form is *not* “already” in act in *S* (i.e. simply by being dynamically possessed by *S*.) Thus the principle, only a being in act can reduce potentiality into actuality, does not gain a foothold even here. It is just that the self-

enactment (self-reduction) of *S* will coincide materially¹³ with a self-enactment of divine form, just because *S* is (and gives) the expressive hypostasis for divine form at this point in space and time. (Notice that it was said that the self-enactment of *S* coincides materially with *a* self-enactment of divine form. To say that the self-enactment of *S* coincides with *the* self-enactment of divine form, or with *all* self-enactment of divine form, might be to imply that either (i) divine form comes into act only in and with this individual *S*, or (ii) there are multiple divine forms rather than multiple indwellings of the same divine form. But such matters take us far beyond this chapter.)

7.2.1. Summary

The Thomistic claim, that the primary agent (God) moves secondary agents (creatures) into their respective operations, was investigated, and important limits were placed on the notion of primary agency. It was argued that thinking primary agency beyond these limits, excludes the possibility of secondary agency. Thus it was proposed that the proximate source of actuality in the self-moving agent is its immanent virtuality (or perhaps the dynamising form(s) with which such virtuality is associated), where *this virtuality does not need to be reduced into act by anything other or more than itself* (with the dynamical subject's concession). Hence, if the presence of virtuality in a creature depends on God's previous or continual act of giving that virtuality in a pre-movement from without—and this *might* mean the infusion of divine form or the empowerment of ontic form or perhaps even both in combination¹⁴—that is not to say that given virtuality must be given its expressive actuality directly from without in any way.

¹³ If not formally (in respect to meaning or definition). See note 54 in chapter 6 for an explanation.

¹⁴ I say "might" because it is not clear whether the presence of pre-motion in a subject entails dynamical possession of dynamising form (intuitively, though, this seems plausible). The presence of habit, infused *or* acquired in the subject, is another matter again.

It is not unreasonable, then, to have serious doubts about the principle in question: whatever is in potentiality cannot be reduced into actuality except by some being in actuality (*quia quod est in potentia, non reducitur in actum nisi per ens actu*). If it accepted that God's primary causation is mediated by pre-motion in secondary agents (except perhaps in extraordinary circumstances, such as miracles), then the most that can be said is that the presence of virtuality/pre-motion in creatures is the effect of primary causation.

7.2.2. Divine Virtuality

In fact, it can even be argued that virtuality can occur without being effected by an agent other to the one whose virtuality it is. It is important to offer (in outline) such an argument here—not in order to secure the critique just made of the Thomistic principle of reduction by actuality, but in order to prevent the absolute primary of actuality returning along a different path. If having virtuality/pre-motion as such implies receiving it from another, and assuming that pre-motion occurs and that its occurrence has an ultimate explanation, then, one might argue, there must be a first mover which has no pre-motion in itself, but which is somehow able to effect it in creatures. In response, it can be asked whether virtuality is essentially dependent (like “son”, “effect”, “secondary”, “generated” and “passive”) or instead something to which dependence is accidental or extraneous (like “substance”, “being”, “act” and “perfection”, according to Thomistic metaphysics, at least¹⁵). In favour of the latter, it is conceivable that God exists in (something like) a primordial state of tension-toward-act—that is, with a virtuality that is absolutely original, caused by nothing. Even *if* it is admitted that the presence of virtuality is impossible without the (pre-moving, dynamising) presence of God, that might not imply that every instance of virtuality has an antecedent cause, without exception. For if there is divine virtuality, this would not be without the pre-motive presence

¹⁵ ST I. Q. 4.

of God, so in this unique case an antecedent cause is not required—divine virtuality would already *be* the necessary dynamising (self-)presence of God. As for constructing an argument from motion in creatures to a First Mover, an interesting *alternative* approach opens to view from here. One might claim, or even attempt to show, that in creatures there can be no self-reduction (self-enacted transition from pre-motion to operation) that does not participate in *divine* self-reduction (by virtue of a dynamical possession of infused divine form).

7.3. Thinking the Transition into Act as Non-Additive Modulation

The second phase of this critique addresses the rationale behind the claim that potentiality cannot bring itself into act. Perhaps this rationale is as follows. Being occurs most perfectly in and as act(uality), whereas potentiality is a certain absence or privation in respect to the intensity and plenitude of act(uality). But what is less perfect cannot be the source of what is more perfect. However, it can be said that the transition of dynamising form (and thus of its subject) from virtuality to expressive actuality is not an “increase” in being at all. The expressive union of a subject and its form represents no novel ontological “content” compared with their pre-active union, no addition in being that would have to be accounted for by positing an already-actual and metaphysically prior principle, either in the same being, or in a higher being.

The point is not that no reference needs to be made to God when accounting for the creature’s dynamic being. It is rather that the transition from a particular virtuality to its subsequent actuality does not as such involve an influx of being from some other principle. It is denied that virtuality is essentially an ontologically “poorer” state-of-being than actuality, such that it would require enrichment from some already-actual principle in order to rise into actuality (where such enrichment would *be* its actualisation). But this is not to deny that the presence

of virtuality in a creature in the first place is explained by God’s dynamically enriching the creature.

On this account, if it is said that the expressive union of subject and form is more “perfect” than their pre-expressive union, this is to do with how the same ontological “content” is now “re-distributed” in the agent—here subject and form are more intensely united, such that form is now expressively “open” or “manifest” in and through this subject—rather than with the reception of some new content from without the form. Expressive union is understood to be a distinct “modality” of being, as it were, one which does not add new ontological content *per se*. The same expressible-formal being is entirely there in virtuality, and also entirely there in actuality, though in different modalities—virtually, then actually. Hence, it would be a mistake to suppose that the appearance of this “more perfect” modality called “actuality” means always the appearance of new formal being. One must therefore distinguish between expressible ontological content, which does not necessarily alter as virtuality goes into actuality, and the modality of such content, which does. One must resist the temptation to think that if actuality is a more perfect modality—even the definition of perfection—there must be an increase in “being” wherever novel actuality occurs, where “being” is then taken as formal content. To avoid this mistake, it might help to call the transition to actuality a non-additive “modulation” of being—non-additive in respect to *what* is modulated, though additive perhaps when it comes to the appearance of a *new modality*.

Such, at least, is one response to the objection that actuality is “more” than virtuality, and must therefore be the efficient source of the transition of something in virtuality to its being-actual (given that the lesser cannot of its own produce the greater). Do things look different if one questions the *hypostasis* of expressible form instead? Perhaps it can be admitted that, in one sense, there is an “influx” of being into expressive hypostasis whenever the virtuality of form is released into expression. However, on the account offered here, this does not mean

that some already-actual principle confers such being, only that the same form prevailing in hypostasis *passively* (passively from the side of hypostasis, which at this stage is only *capable* of expressible act) now prevails there perfectly as the expressive act of hypostasis. Indeed, it was argued that there must be two stages of union between a subject and its dynamising form (pre-active, then active) if the subject is to be able to act by virtue of its dynamising form.¹⁶ From this perspective, it is problematic—incompatible with agency—to say that the subject’s possession of some expressible form totally *begins* with expressive union, such that the transition to the subject’s being-in-act is the *fresh influx* of formal being, as opposed to the continuation and fruition of an indwelling that *already began* in “pre-active” union.

7.4. The “Production” of Act

Thirdly, there is the problematic nature of the absolute primacy of actuality, which the principle in question (only a being in actuality can reduce something from potentiality into act) ultimately entails.¹⁷ As argued above, it is hard to see how anything, creaturely *or* divine, could put itself *into* an act *A* if it were already in act *A* independently of this “putting”. But it seems that, to exclude the possibility that an agent *S* can put itself *into* act, is already to exclude the possibility of agency altogether for *S*. Thus if an act *A* is not “produced” by an agent *S*, then *S* is not an agent in respect to *A*. But if *A* by its nature already holds true in *S*, independently of any production by *S*, how could *S* possibly have *produced A*? For example, if God simply and essentially *is* his activity, as Aquinas argues, how could it be true that he is genuinely the “productive subject” (agent) of this activity?

¹⁶ See §6.5. above.

¹⁷ If it is admitted that things go from potentiality to actuality.

An adequate critique of Aquinas's theory of operation would have to account for his theory of transitive action (*agere, actio*) and attend to the following propositions of his, as listed by Lonergan:

(A) Change from rest to activity is change in an improper and metaphorical sense; (B) the reverse change from activity to rest takes place without any real change in the agent; (C) when the agent is acting there is no composition of agent and action; (D) what remains unchanged is the *principium* or *causa actionis*; (E) what comes and goes without changing the agent is the formal content, *ut ab agente*; (F) the analysis holds even in the case of a created agent such as fire.¹⁸

Only a relatively brief response to this view can be offered here. Suppose it is true that there is no objective difference *in God* between (1) his having of being (*esse in*) and (2) his giving of being (*esse ad*) to creatures on that basis. Suppose, that is, that the “formal content” which is associated with God *qua* creator—namely, the fact that he is efficacious as creator, *ut ab agente*, and that being proceeds “beyond” him into creatures—does not represent the addition of some actuality to God's original plenitude of being. Putting aside the question of whether it could have been possible for God to never create, one can ask about the nature of the creative *esse ad*. Is this procession something that God has command over? In other words, regarding the outward procession of being which effects creatures, did/does God *make it happen*? Either being effectively emanates from God *with* his consent (this might be compatible with the idea that *it could not have been otherwise*, but that is another matter), or *independently* of any such consent. The Thomist affirms the former (God is sovereign agent),¹⁹ while denying that the creative *esse ad* represents an *objective* addition to God over

¹⁸ Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, 70-71. He cites *De Potentia*, Q. 7 aa. 8-9.

¹⁹ *ST I*. Q. 46, a. 1, ad. 10. “Given the action, the effect follows according to the requirement of the form, which is the principle of action. But in agents acting by will, what is conceived and preordained is to be taken as the form, which is the principle of action. Therefore from the eternal action of God an eternal effect did not follow; but such an effect as God willed, an effect, to wit, which has being after not being.” English Dominican translation.

and above his *esse in* (it is said that the only real addition occurs on the side of what receives being).

Now this appears to exclude the following “differential” thesis: there is some objective basis in God that would account for the fact that there *does* occur a creative procession of being from God (one might understand this basis to be the divine “allowance”, “consent” or “letting go” of being and power). If *esse ad* makes no real difference to God when compared with the hypothetical situation in which God does not create (or when compared with the same creator God considered logically prior to his creative act), and if the divine *esse in* is exactly identical between the two cases, then arguably, there could be no fact about God—not even a state of *volition*—that would account for the fact that there is a creative *processio* rather than none at all. The occurrence or non-occurrence of *esse ad* would in either case be a *brute* fact, it would seem.

If in response to this it is said that God as an agent accounts for this fact, then again it must be asked: did (does) God (1) *put* himself into the condition whereby being is allowed to proceed outwards from God and thus actually *does* proceed? Or does this condition (2) already hold in God independently of any such “putting”, such that it is included simply in the original plenitude of divine *esse in*? Or does this condition perhaps (3) arise of its own accord, either necessarily, or contingently? It is hard to see how option (2) *or* (3) might be compatible with the thesis that God is in command as creative agent. For that reason, it seems better to opt for (1) and say that, over and above God’s original and essential being, there is a volitional state in God—a *Fiat* which is *put forth*²⁰ from out of, and on the basis of, the divine being. If this *Fiat* is understood to be (an aspect of) the creative *esse ad*, then *esse ad* needs to be

²⁰ Or perhaps a putting-forth which is “put forth” in a secondary sense, only with what is put forth in a primary sense (in this case, the created world).

understood as an objective addition to God—otherwise one simply reverts to the problem raised at the beginning of the previous paragraph.²¹

7.5. Milbank on the Primacy of Actuality

Finally, it is worth asking whether John Milbank subscribes to the Aristotelian/Thomistic view, that actuality is absolutely primary. Certain passages of particular texts might give that impression. For example, in a fairly recent (2007) essay, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics: On the Modalities of Terror”,²² Milbank commends the primacy of actuality explicitly. He claims (predictably, for Milbank) that without it some form of nihilism (and “terror”) is inevitable, and makes numerous positive references to the metaphysics of Aristotle and Aquinas. However, a closer look reveals that Milbank takes a position similar to the one proposed in this chapter.

First, he claims that the primacy of the possible will take one of two modalities in any given philosophy. Both of these assume the opposition, which Milbank refuses, between form and infinity—form is circumscribable, exhaustively given in the present, where conversely, the infinite is completely formless, *apeiron*.²³ The two modalities of possibilism (and “terror”) are said to be, roughly: essentialism (the subsumption of concrete events and phenomena under the logically predetermined) and voluntarism (the primacy of a formlessly infinite power, virtuality or will):

²¹ Thomists will object that admitting such a *Fiat* in God in addition to his being, is to contravene God’s simplicity. *ST I. Q. 3*, esp. aa. 6-7. I am not sure how to respond properly to that objection; in any case an adequate response would have to be extensive.

²² Milbank, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics: On the Modalities of Terror” in Connor Cunningham and Peter M. Candler, Jr., *Belief and Metaphysics* (London: SCM Press, 2007), 452-499. A more recent essay refers to the primacy of the actual also. Milbank, “The Return of Mediation” in John Milbank, Slavoj Žižek, and Creston Davis, *Paul’s New Moment: Continental Philosophy and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2010), 211-38, esp. 223-25.

²³ See David Bentley Hart, *The Beauty of the Infinite*; John R. Betz, “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part One)”, *Modern Theology* 21 (2005), 367-411; *ibid.*, “Beyond the Sublime: The Aesthetics of the Analogy of Being (Part Two)”, *Modern Theology* 22 (2006), 1-50. See also §§2.9.1 and 2.9.2. above.

[T]he possible can only be either the logically predetermined or else the reserve of sheer power and blind will, whereas the actual alone can present us with a genuinely new possibility ... since it can show us a truth or a beauty or a goodness inseparable from its own contingent enactment.²⁴

A certain “exemplarism” is thus favoured, against the errors of Milbank’s usual suspects, Scotus and Kant:

But in post-Kantian thought, an event can only be a subordinate empirical instance ‘for us’ of quasi-categorical unity, difference, truth, goodness or beauty. This means that the ‘feedback loop’ from event to category is now lost: a particular work of charity as performed by a saint or by Jesus can now no longer redefine for us our whole sense of good as such, since this is exhaustively and formally defined by the categorical imperative; a strangely beautiful person or painting can likewise no longer reconfigure our entire sense of beauty, since this is also formally and entirely defined as the experience of the ineffable co-ordination of all the faculties.²⁵

[W]ith the shift in meaning of ‘transcendental’ and especially of the transcendental *esse* from Scotus through to Kant and beyond, actuality is modally subordinated to possibility and in consequence the *event is reduced to the status of the illustrative*.²⁶

What Milbank means by the “priority of the actual” in this context, then, is the primacy of the event of the concrete and singular, and thus the importance of history, in our experience (*Erfahrung*) of the universal and eternal.²⁷ Hence Milbank is positive about Hegel's refusal to downplay the novel difference that Christianity makes to history and culture. On Milbank’s view, the *sui generis* form of the religion of Incarnation cannot be explained in terms of some

²⁴ Milbank, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics”, 473.

²⁵ Ibid., 471.

²⁶ Ibid., 472. Milbank’s emphasis. “For Aquinas ... being, especially the higher sort of beings, are more defined by the actuality of what they do (‘first act’ or ‘first perfection’) and by the actual ends which they reach (‘third perfection’), than by the initially given characteristics of the inert substantial being (‘first act’ or ‘first perfection’). All this means, in effect ... that Thomas’s metaphysics of *esse* itself opens out the excess over any pre-given essentialist ontology of the occurrence of the event” (469). He cites Milbank and Pickstock, *Truth in Aquinas* (London: Routledge, 2001), 34; Aquinas, *ST I. Q. 6, a. 3* resp; *ST I-II. Q. 3 a.* [sic Milbank, a. 2 is appropriate] resp; *ST. III, Q. 9, a. 1* resp.

²⁷ Cf. “The Sublime in Kierkegaard” in Phillip Blond (ed.), *Post-secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 131-156. The Platonic doctrine of *anamnesis* is interpreted in this manner by Milbank and Pickstock. “... Plato, with his notion of the Good as a transcendent plenitude which we partially recollect only through *ever new* occasions for recollection encountered in a forward movement in time.” *BR*, 167. See also Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On The Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

more “basic” aspect of human nature, as is supposed in sociology and Marxism.²⁸ Now *the critique offered above, of the absolute primacy of actuality, does not negate the primacy of the event of the singular, nor the importance of history*. It is certainly possible to hold that the presence of virtuality can suffice for self-enactment, while agreeing with Milbank on singularity and history.

Milbank’s rejection of the other modality of possibilism is clearest in his commentary on Schelling elsewhere:

[F]or Schelling, the good will of God is the result of a radical decision within the dark indifferent ground of the infinite, and this alone ensures that God really is good, according any fashion of goodness that we can understand.²⁹

[T]he problem with [Schelling’s] de-ontologization and de-infinitization of the Good is that it thereby inherits the Kantian problem of an undecidability between good and evil. If God decides to share a neutral infinite with us, what renders this gift, rather than a kind of establishing of empire via a grant of being? How might the gift of being not be perhaps disguised domination, unless the infinite we are granted to share in is in itself unshakable, as infinite peace and harmony according to a substantive aesthetic measure?³⁰

For this Anglo-Catholic, if God (or Being, or the Absolute) were basically “neutral” or “indifferent”—if there were no original divine order—then the decision of God to be loving (even *ad intra*) would be voluntaristic; it would be an arbitrary (though eternal) expression of sheer will. But in that case (and to elaborate) love would not be more “ontologically possible” (in accordance with the necessary rhythm of Being, and therefore cosmically harmonious,

²⁸ Milbank, “For and Against Hegel” in *TST2*, 147-176. Yet Milbank (in the same section) counter-balances this with the following. Despite Hegel’s metacritical/expressivist response to Kantian criticism, *poesis* in Hegel is finally subordinate to necessary logic, confirming implicitly William Desmond’s thesis in *Art and the Absolute: A Study of Hegel’s Aesthetics* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986).

²⁹ Milbank, *BR*, 7. “God’s goodness also is a loving decision; it is an offer, a free gift, not an inevitability. Were it the latter, how could we be grateful, how could we feel infinitely loved? (Schelling has a certain point here, even though I shall later dissent).”

³⁰ Milbank, *BR*, 16. He cites F.W.J. Schelling, “Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom and Related Matters” in *Philosophy of German Idealism*, ed. Ernest Behler (New York: Continuum, 1987); *ibid.*, *Of Human Freedom*, trans. J. Gutman (Chicago: Open Court, 1936); Slavoj Žižek, “Selfhood as Such is Spirit” in Joan Copjec (ed.), *Radical Evil* (London: Verso, 1996), 1-30.

revealing of the Whole, and eschatologically triumphant) than either hatred or indifference. In other words, the eternal self-possession of a “God” who hates would be no less perfect than the eternal self-possession of a God who loves (to compare hypothetical alternatives).

Here it is useful to distinguish between “divine will” as (i) originary substance, as (ii) the divine act of freedom, and as (iii) what God actually wills. In this context, “possibilism” is a particular way of thinking divine will in the *first* sense—namely, as “dark indifferent ground”, such that a divine act that is unloving (for example) would be just as much an act, and just as free, as an act that is loving. If “actualism” interprets divine power as always-already inclined to a certain way of acting—that is, as inclined to *the one true way* of acting—then “possibilism” interprets divine power as sheer excess of possibility, as an infinite reserve “free” from any such order or essential disposition.³¹ Again, “actualism” reads *agere sequitur esse* in a stronger sense which appeals to a certain measure, proportion or order as grounded in (divine) *esse*, and thus takes the “unlimitedness” of power in a weaker sense. Conversely, “possibilism” reads *agere sequitur esse* in a weaker sense such that the “unlimitedness” of power is given a stronger reading (it is not limited by order).³²

In sum, for Milbank there is a necessary and eternal “theo-ontological law”, as it were. Independently of any decision (human *or* divine), this law determines which “ways” of being and acting are *true* being and *true* acting (and to what extent). So for created persons, the gifts of being, power and freedom, must be received and enacted in a certain way in order to be properly enjoyed and possessed. The negation of this general thesis is what Gilles Deleuze

³¹ “For the more he [Badiou] rejects the unifyingly virtual as a foundational principle, the more he appears to break with a Bergsonian-Heideggerean emancipation of the possible from the primacy of the actual—an ‘emancipation’ that always subordinates the Event to a merely forceful ‘power’ of which it is an instance. Instead, Badiou seeks to render the import of the Event as itself ultimate, precisely by conjoining it to the ultimacy of actuality—which is an Aristotelian and Thomistic thesis.” Milbank, “The Return of Mediation”, 223.

³² For Milbank, if there is a certain indeterminacy in God, this is an “indeterminacy that is not impersonal chaos but infinite interpersonal harmonious order, in which time participates.” *RONT*, 1-2. But this may need supplementing if interpersonal harmonious order, i.e. Trinity, is what follows appropriately and necessarily from divine *esse*. That is, it should also be said that the indeterminacy or excess of originary divine *esse*, is ordered toward Triune activity.

calls the “univocity of being”: there is no ranking amongst the diverse ways³³ of being; each is fully being, without qualification.³⁴ What Milbank means by the “priority of the actual” in this context, then, is the *analogy* of being, where this signifies ranking amongst diverse instances and ways of being:

This modal priority given to the actual means, for Aquinas (if not for Aristotle), that being is not a ‘bare attribute’ to which other purely essential qualities are super-added, but rather that all the qualities of, say, a coin, are primarily there not as possibilities but as actualities, as new manifestations of being as such, instances of further participation in being. In this way, for Aquinas, a new actuality can reveal to us ‘more’ of *esse* and there can be a hierarchy of more or less intense disclosures of *esse*.³⁵

Now the “priority of the actual” taken in *this* sense, is *also* compatible with the primacy of virtuality proposed above. For to say that the presence of virtuality suffices for self-motion or self-enactment, and that divine act, if it occurs, would have to proceed from an original divine virtuality, is not to say that virtuality is “sheer power” or “indifferent ground” in the way that Milbank finds problematic. There is nothing to prevent one from understanding virtuality, either generally, or in a specific instance, as inclined toward a certain well-ordered mode of activity, in accordance with ontological law, divine order and/or proper nature.³⁶

³³ Where “ways” is not to be taken in the more restricted sense (“true ways”).

³⁴ “The words ‘everything is equal’ may therefore resound joyfully, on condition that they are said *of* that which is not equal in this equal, univocal Being: equal being is immediately present in everything, without mediation or intermediary, even though things reside unequally in this equal being. There, however, where they are borne by hubris, all things are in absolute proximity, and whether they are large or small, inferior or superior, none of them participates more or less in being, nor receives it by analogy. Univocity of being thus also signifies equality of being. Univocal being is at one and the same time nomadic distribution and crowned anarchy.” Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London & New York: Continuum, 2004), 47. See the contributions to *Modern Theology* (21), October 2005, for discussion on univocity (in relation to Scotus in particular).

³⁵ Milbank, “Only Theology Saves Metaphysics”, 472.

³⁶ Milbank is critical of Heidegger’s “possiblism” also. See, e.g., “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek” in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233, esp. 135, 147-149; “The Return of Mediation”, 223; and *TST* 2, 298-304.

The third and final aspect of Milbank's "actualism" is his appeal to the Thomistic doctrine, according to which God is pure act.³⁷ However, on this point (and not *only* this point), Milbank attempts to re-read Aquinas and bring him into line with other thinkers. It would seem that this theologian's predilections lie more with Nicholas of Cusa, Meister Eckhart and Eriugena:

... *actus* in the infinite God does not denote exactly that 'termination' of possibility in act that finite act does; hence one could argue that for Aquinas the divine infinite act fulfils as sustaining the 'active possibility' that is *virtus*, even if it infinitely fulfils it. This is clearer in Nicholas of Cusa for whom, in God, the contrast of act and possibility is overcome as *possest*.³⁸

The result of the contingency of deliverance [Christ's redemptive incarnation, death and resurrection] is paradoxically the eternal inclusion of human nature under a divine enhypostasization. Since God is impassible, although this circumstance only begins to be in time, this beginning-to-be must somehow belong eternally to God.³⁹

[B]y raising intellect to co-primacy with being as a nullity 'beyond being,' Eckhart was able to allow that there is a kind of infinite 'coming-to-be' expressed by the idea of the divine Trinity, without attributing to the passionless God any real change. God, as it were, echoing Eriugena, eternally creates himself.⁴⁰

On this picture, God, as the Good, is the "full presence of the actual", and yet this full presence is an eternal act of realising divine *virtus*.⁴¹ One can assume that Milbank, in appealing to Cusa's *possest*, which supposedly "overcomes" the contrast between act and possibility, does not intend to erase this distinction entirely, in favour of strict simplicity.

³⁷ *ST I*, Q. 3, esp. aa. 6-7.

³⁸ Milbank, "Only Theology Saves Metaphysics", 495.

³⁹ *BR*, xii. See also p. 60 (God is "pure act").

⁴⁰ Milbank, "The Double Glory", 175.

⁴¹ *TST2*, 430 ff. For Milbank's understanding of *virtus* see his *Theology and Social Theory*, 2nd edn, 430 ff. (*actus* and *virtus* in God) and 327-80 (*virtus* and virtue). Consider also the following suggestive remark in Milbank, "On 'Thomistic Kabbalah'", *Modern Theology* 27 (2011), 147-85. "The Son as *Logos* is a perfect terminus, yet an infinite terminus can only fulfil desire by further inciting it" (151). See also Milbank, "The Shares of Being or Gift, Relation and Participation: an Essay on the Metaphysics of Emmanuel Levinas and Alain Badiou." Centre of Theology and Philosophy (2006), 24. This is accessible at www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk/papers.php#milbank

7.6. Conclusion

Against Aristotle and Aquinas, it can be argued that the transition to act(uality) is merely a “modulation” of ontological content that need not involve a problematic “increase” in being—an increase which would require further explanation in terms of some metaphysical addition or “reduction” from without. There is also a strong argument to the effect that the (efficient) primacy of virtuality is the condition for the possibility of divine act, and even of operation in general. This deepens our understanding of dynamical possession in its distinction from metaphysical possession (stage two of the overall argument of the thesis), in support of the argument that plural possession is the condition for gift and participation (stage one).

In relation to the work of Milbank, this primacy of virtuality does *not* entail the “primacy of the possible” in either of the senses that Milbank eschews—essentialism (the subsumption of concrete events and phenomena under the logically predetermined) and voluntarism (the primacy of a formlessly infinite power, virtuality or will). Despite his explicitly affirming the “primacy of actuality”, Milbank does not object to the view that virtuality is primary, even in God. Milbank’s questionable reading of Aquinas’s doctrine of God in terms of *virtus* serves only to confirm this latter point. However appealing Milbank’s retrieval of Eriugena, Eckhart and Cusa, it is hard to see how the notion of divine *posse* or *possest* can be reconciled with the Thomistic doctrine of divine simplicity. It is one thing to say that God is eternally *in act*, which may well accommodate divine *virtus*, and another to say, with Aquinas, that God simply *is* pure act, which is not so accommodating. Milbank attempts to have it both ways: to appeal to the authority of Aquinas, and also to posit real distinction and order between *virtus*

and *actus* in God, following more eccentric theologians.⁴² The next chapter applies the results of the overall argument of the thesis (which is now complete) in defence of Milbank's theo-ontology, against recent feminist objections.

⁴² William J. Meyer questions the coherence of Milbank's doctrine of God in a related way in "A Radical-Orthodox Theology: The Approach of John Milbank" in *Metaphysics and the Future of Theology: The Voice of Theology in Public Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 407-82. See esp. 439-40.

8. Questioning Transcendence

8.1. Introduction

In this chapter a response is made to some feminist objections to Milbank's appeal to divine "transcendence", making use of the propriological distinction developed above. It is argued that the polemics of Catherine Keller, Marion Grau and Mayra Rivera Rivera are somewhat misdirected. Milbank does not oppose immanence and transcendence in the problematic way that these theologians claim. Several senses of "immanence" are distinguished, and a defence is made of Milbank's claim that human persons abide in and repeat Christ.

8.2. Questioning God as Giver

The second chapter opened with Catherine Keller's approval of John Milbank's "ecstatic reciprocity", and his "exchangist" account of the gift. It was shown that both these theologians critique a "unilateralist" (purely selfless) account of gift-giving, and the ethics of "self-sacrifice". An analysis of Keller's critical comments was postponed for this chapter, which deals with several aspects of the critique of "transcendence" that appears in the recent volume, *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"*.¹

Keller takes issue with Milbank's (supposed) continuation of the traditionally transcendent God. She argues that Milbank's understanding of the relation between God and the world does not follow through with the notion of "ecstatic reciprocity" but instead falls back on a (paternalistic) theological model of vertical order, which effectively devalues the natural world:

¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"* (London and New York: T and T Clark, 2006).

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My specific contention with Milbank may boil down to this: the reciprocity he seeks to reinstate as the basis of an alternative theology of the gift needs a deeper, and so more radical, theological ground than either poststructural groundlessness *or* an orthodox foundationalism can provide. How does the ontology of participation stretch all the way into the constitutive reciprocities of “life now in time,” except as a supernatural donation, from the transcendent outside, beyond, after all?²

This passage raises two issues. First, there is the situating of Milbank as a “foundationalist”, whereas Milbank’s use of “participation” in metaphysics, ethics and epistemology, is neither (a) “groundlessly poststructural”, *nor* (b) “foundational” in any reactionary sense.³ In regard to (a), Milbank (along with Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward) affirms “the rational possibility, and the faithfully *perceived* actuality, of an indeterminacy that is *not impersonal chaos* but infinite interpersonal harmonious order in which time participates.”⁴ In regard to (b), for Milbank transcendence is “not something clearly grasped, spatially fixed and operable, but rather something eternally present yet not fully accessible”⁵ Nor does Milbank encourage a certain “positivism” of faith, whereby certain fundamental doctrines of the Church are imposed on a passive, unthinking believer, or simply repeated through time, identically:

I want in general to suggest that we regard postmodernity, like modernity, as a kind of distorted outcome of energies first unleashed by the Church itself. If that is the case, then our attitude is bound to be a complex one. Not outright refusal, nor outright acceptance. More like an attempt at radical redirection of what we find. In recommending such a redirection, I suggest that *neither a reiteration of Christian orthodoxy in identically repeated handed-down formulas, nor a liberal adaptation to postmodern assumption will serve as well.*⁶

² Catherine Keller, “Is That All?: Gift and Reciprocity in Milbank’s *Being Reconciled*” in Rosemary Radford Ruether and Marion Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 18-35, here 31. Keller’s emphasis.

³ See §§2.9.1. and 2.9.2. above for Milbank on participation.

⁴ *RONT*, 1-2. My emphasis.

⁵ *BR*, 174.

⁶ *BR*, 196. My emphasis. See also Milbank, “Enclaves, or Where is the Church?” in *The Future of Love: Essays in Political Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2009), 133-44; “The Second Difference” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 171-93.

However, if by “foundationalism” Keller means the thesis that God is eternal, immutable and self-sufficient, and thus the source and giver of being⁷ (whether or not we *access* this truth by some form of *epistemic* foundationalism is *another* matter) then in a sense Keller is right to call Milbank a “foundationalist”—though such a term is misleading (and effective perhaps in giving Keller’s argument underhanded rhetorical force).

Second, there are problems related to the reference to “participation”. Keller positions herself polemically about this idea in a fashion that is (at least partially) misdirected. She apparently ascribes to Milbank a position which he has clearly defined himself *against* for his whole intellectual career, namely, an “extrinsicist” reading of the relation between nature and grace—a reading which Henri de Lubac and others in the *nouvelle théologie* spent their creative energies overturning.⁸ If Milbank is anything, he is a convinced follower of de Lubac. Only one other 20th century theologian enjoys as much of Milbank’s esteem, namely, Sergei Bulgakov.⁹ Milbank writes that

contemporary Catholic theology, if it is to avoid both a liberalism and a conservatism that are predicated on the idea of an autonomous pure nature, needs to recover the authentic and more radical account of the natural desire for the supernatural as offered by de Lubac ... This account is articulated in terms of spirit always oriented to grace ... [and] the cosmos as lured by grace through humanity.”¹⁰

At first glance, then, it seems bizarre that Keller could write in response to Milbank that “‘supernature versus nature’ is a crude organising principle for the complexity of the

⁷ *BR*, 60; *TST2*, 430 ff. See also §7.5. above.

⁸ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle: Henri de Lubac and the Debate Concerning the Supernatural* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); Tracey Rowland, *Culture and the Thomist Tradition: After Vatican II* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), esp. 30, 92-95. As Rowland explains (94), “extrinsicism” is a term coined by Maurice Blondel.

⁹ “The drastic implications of Henri de Lubac’s thought have only gradually come to light. Despite the indirectness and fragmentary character of his work ... his influence has now outlasted that of many once famous names. Arguably he is, along with Sergei Bulgakov, one of the two truly great theologians of the twentieth century.” Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 104.

¹⁰ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*, 107-8.

spatiotemporal continuum, indicative of boredom with the earth more than interest in its transfiguration.”¹¹

However, a more charitable reading, informed by the rest of her eco-feministic text, might indicate that Keller would say that the de Lubacian “revolution” is insufficient. For Keller it would not be enough to overturn the idea (and practice) of a “pure” or ungraced domain of nature to which the supernatural is super-added “extrinsically” (so as to emphasise the gratuity of grace).¹² Keller has a different programme, a different theological restlessness and hope. She evidently believes that the one thing that could possibly enchant the cosmos theologically is neither “intrinsicism” (de Lubac) nor “sophiology”¹³ (Bulgakov)—for on these views God still figures as unaffected ground, unreceptive giver—but rather a process theology in which God is not vertically “transcendent”, let alone immutable. Keller prescribes a critical unearthing and eschewing of any “unilateralism” in which God figures as absolute—as founding giver, as pure act, as non-receiving, in contrast to needy, secondary creation:

The ‘ecstatic reciprocity’ needs by [Milbank’s] own account a divine home—an *oikeosis* of two-way love. Without some version of what Whitehead called ‘the consequent nature of God,’ some way of thematizing the temporal, receptive, passionate life of God, I fear that this entire argument on behalf of reciprocity is undermined precisely where it matters most: in its doctrine of God. God remains impassive, apathetic, and absolutely active—that is, more Aristotelian than biblical ... An alternative subjectivity, in which subjects arise moment to moment as events of inter-becoming ... calls for a theology of radical reciprocity ... [O]nly a God imagined as enjoying infinite reciprocity with the universe will lure from us an ethic

¹¹ Keller, “Is That All?”, 31.

¹² “Claude Bruaire argued that, if the Creation is the first receiving of gift such that it is, in itself, through and through *gift without remainder*, then it must originally subsist as the reflexive reception of itself as gift ...” Milbank, “The Gift and the Mirror: On the Philosophy of Love” in Kevin Hart (ed.), *Counter-Experiences: Reading Jean-Luc Marion* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2007), 253-317, here 278. My emphasis. Milbank draws on Bruaire in his understanding of grace as a gift “without contrast” (i.e., it is not as if the gratuity of grace consists in some unnecessary arrival at a purely natural, non-gifted substrate). See Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*. Cf. Antonio López, *Spirit’s Gift: The Metaphysical Insight of Claude Bruaire* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2006).

¹³ This term is explained shortly, in §8.4.

adequate to our own gruesomely vulnerable, festively gifted interdependence one with another.¹⁴

In defence of Keller, then, one might suggest that she means the following: Milbank's theology, *despite* its best efforts, *ends up* devaluing creation, insofar as it still places the latter in strictly unilateral dependence on a God seen to be transcendently immutable. But in response to this, it can be said *first*, that it is careless to make such unqualified remarks about Milbank ("supernature versus nature"; "boredom with the earth") so directly and without bothering to relate them to his appropriation of Henri de Lubac.¹⁵ *Second*, and more importantly, while it is true that Milbank eschews process theology ("One must deliberately refrain ... from any ascription of 'event' as involving change in God: this would be incompatible with his aseity") he still struggles with the "consequences" for divine being of the Word's incarnation. "Nevertheless, the implication of Chalcedonian doctrine appears to be that God is not only infinite esse, outside time, but also the subject of this particular series of events in time resumed as a resurrected human nature through all eternity."¹⁶ Milbank's Christology is returned to in later sections.

8.3. Questioning God as "CEO"

The unilateralist logic that figures negatively in this feminist diagnosis is clearly explained by Marion Grau in the same volume.¹⁷ Grau makes basically the same objection as that of Keller:

¹⁴ Keller, "Is That All?", 33-34. William J. Meyer's critique of Milbank also advocates process theology. See William J. Meyer, "A Radical-Orthodox Theology: The Approach of John Milbank" in *Metaphysics and the Future of Theology: The Voice of Theology in Public Life* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), 407-82.

¹⁵ Milbank positive relation to de Lubac is already shown in the volume to which Keller responds explicitly. See *BR*, 113-122.

¹⁶ *BR*, 71.

¹⁷ Marion Grau, "'We Must Give Ourselves to Voyaging': Regifting the Theological Present" in Ruether and Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 141-60.

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Milbank assumes that ethical exchanges among human agents are reciprocal, in critical distance from an ethic of sacrifice ... However, he reserves redemption and forgiveness as a divine ‘true gift.’ God remains only a giver, yet is never a recipient in a gift exchange. Thus, the God-given gift is a ‘transcendental category’ in a way that structures theological discourse ... This gifting, and the related *methexis* as a ‘sharing of being and knowledge in the Divine’, appear to flow only in one direction: From God to humans, and from there to other humans, but never toward ‘him’.¹⁸

Grau develops this feminist critique further, actually, in economic terms. In accordance with the tone of the whole volume, Grau’s essay combines feminist and process theology with postcolonial criticism:

The God image reiterated by Milbank builds upon a long but increasingly problematic tradition of casting God as a propertied male owner and humanity as an impoverished, lacking, feminized subject ... God is here in the traditional husband, king, (and in more contemporary terms) CEO position in a structure that equates God with the good, abundance, and wealth, and juxtaposes it to evil, lack, and poverty.¹⁹

One wonders how does Grau intends one to respond to such sweeping statements, particularly the last sentence. Does she expect even the informed reader to agree, saying, “yes, it is quite clear that Augustine’s theological effort against the Manicheans and in favour of the goodness of material creation,²⁰ and Aquinas’s use of *methexis* to explain how creation is good in itself though not independently of God’s sustaining activity,²¹ and his consistent affirmation that grace presupposes and builds upon nature,²² *as well as* the sacramental essence of the Church which celebrates and repeats the *Word made flesh*—these quite obviously juxtapose an abundant, good God to an *evil* creation”? It would seem that Grau “muddies the waters” to cast the opposition in a negative light and to make it appear that her

¹⁸ Ibid., 147. Grau cites *BR*, ix.

¹⁹ Ibid., 148. Grau also asks, poignantly, “What would [Milbank’s] reciprocity look like in an imperial context where one of the tasks at hand may be to rethink how power, empire, and theology intersect?” (146, citing *BR* 125).

²⁰ See Milbank, “Evil: Darkness and Silence” in *BR*, 1-25.

²¹ See §5.3. above.

²² E.g. *ST I. Q. 2 a. 2 ad 1.*

“solution” is obvious and necessary. There is a world of difference between “evil”, which orthodox Christianity has never ascribed to creation as such—and which, since Augustine, has traditionally been seen as merely a *privation* of being (and here Milbank follows suit)²³—and finitude and the natural desire for the withdrawing God, which are traditionally essential to creation.²⁴ Furthermore, one might ask Grau which theologians she has in mind when she writes of “the problematic tradition of casting God as a *propertied* male owner”. Is there really an orthodox theological tradition which thinks that God is “rich” with some *property*—some object-like thing or commodity—rather than with the divine life which God simply *is*? It is hard not to conclude that the tradition against which Grau gains her points—against which her postcolonial feminism is upheld as a salve—does not really exist.

More charitably, however, one might assume that beneath this rhetoric, Grau’s point (once she recovers from the critique above) is not, in the final analysis, that traditionally God is infinitely rich with *something*, but that God is taken to be the infinitely full donator of being and life and goodness—where creatures, by contrast, are the in-themselves-empty recipients of such gifts. So would Grau prefer it that there were no order in the sharing of gifts—neither differences in perfection, nor in order of dependence? Would it suit her democratic sentiment if all persons, God included, had in themselves the source of everything they could possibly need and desire? Surely *not*—such would no longer be a thought of “ecstatic reciprocity”, but one of self-sufficient individualism. Actually, Grau’s worry here is the same as Keller’s. Her

²³ See Milbank, “Evil: Darkness and Silence” in *BR*, 1-25. For a critique of the privation theory of evil, see John F. Crosby, “Is All Evil Really Only Privation?”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly*, 75 (2002), 197-209; Crosby, “Doubts About the Privation Theory That Will Not Go Away: Response to Patrick Lee”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 81 (2007), 489-505.

²⁴ Milbank, *The Suspended Middle*; Henri de Lubac, *The Mystery of the Supernatural*, trans. Rosemary Sheed (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998). See also Milbank, “The Double Glory, or Paradox versus Dialectics: On Not Quite Agreeing with Slavoj Žižek” in Slavoj Žižek and John Milbank, *The Monstrosity of Christ: Paradox or Dialectic?* ed. Creston Davis (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2009), 110-233, esp. 202: “The traditional participatory view (as summed up in Aquinas) understood that, if creatures are not self-standing, then there is nothing complete and autonomous in finite nature, including especially human nature, which is unaware of its origin ... [T]he creature by his very nature paradoxically longs for and somehow intimates what he cannot know by nature and cannot even intimate by nature alone—namely, his supernatural raising to the vision of God and the status of participated sonship.”

claim is that once we position two parties in a strict dualism of giver-versus-recipient—pure source and “act” on one hand, versus pure neediness and “passion” on the other—we remove the intrinsic worth and dignity of the second party, and make the first into a self-enclosed, dominating ego after all (whether or not the first party is thought to be a “generous giver” makes no difference in the end). So it is not desire or need *as such* that Grau protests against, but the dualistic *separation* of pure donative plenitude over-against pure poverty and dependence.²⁵ Each party in a loving exchange has instead to be thought as a giving recipient, a receiving giver (one might even develop this thought further and propose that each is a giver *insofar* as he/she receives from the other, and is a recipient *insofar* as he/she gives to the other). It is in this vein that Keller and Grau assert Milbank fails to apply the principle of reciprocity “radically”—that is, to the relation between God and the world.

8.4. Questioning “Supernatural Donation”

As already indicated, Catherine Keller questions the theological suitability of Milbank’s ontology of participation: “How does the ontology of participation stretch all the way into the constitutive reciprocities of ‘life now in time,’ except as a supernatural donation, from the transcendent outside, beyond, after all?”²⁶ Presumably, Keller means to say that “supernatural donation, from the transcendent outside” is bad insofar as it means God’s unilateral donation to a purely passive recipient, as just explained. If that is so, then apart from the disingenuous use of “supernatural” (as dealt with above), the question is misleading since it implies that in Milbank’s thought, (a) God’s self-donation arrives at creatures in a purely passive mode, and (b) God’s transcendence is such that he is not also immanent in all creation.

²⁵ See §2.3. above for a more detailed exploration.

²⁶ Keller, “Is That All?”, 31.

Neither of these claims represents the thought of John Milbank. Against (a), the preface to *BR* clearly explains that Milbank’s creative appropriation of *methexis* combines the Neoplatonic and medieval emphasis on sharing in the transcendent with a “modern” emphasis on human language, creativity and culture.²⁷ Far from thinking the reception of the supernatural as an utterly passive affair in contrast to the domain of properly human activity, Milbank refers to the “middle voice”²⁸ and thus affirms “the degree of activity which informs every reception in order for it to be a response or mode of interpretation or intervention.”²⁹ Approving the use that Nicholas of Cusa makes of the notion of *poesis*, Milbank claims that “human creative power and natural power is never equal to God, and yet in its very creative exercise participates in the divine *Logos* or *Ars*”.³⁰ Milbank first explored such Renaissance themes in his doctoral research on Giambattista Vico.³¹ Against (b), it was argued in a previous chapter that Milbank’s ontology of participation involves the self-diffusion of God.³² This is also shown by Milbank’s reading of “sophiology.” That reading begins with a problem: how was it possible for God to create, given that “there is no exterior to God, no sum which might add to his amount”? The sophiological solution is: God “must have gone outside of himself”.³³ That is, God is given forth as “Sophia”, the ontological ground or “womb” in which creation has its being. Milbank refers to

²⁷ *BR*, ix.

²⁸ This was explored in §2.8.1. above.

²⁹ *BR*, 31.

³⁰ *BR*, 199. *Poesis* is also explored in Milbank, “A Christological Poetics” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 123-44. A relevant book on this topic in the Radical Orthodoxy series is Robert C. Miner, *Truth in the Making: Knowledge and Creation in Modern Philosophy and Theology* (London: Routledge, 2003).

³¹ The two-volume published version of this work is: John Milbank, *The Religious Dimensions in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744. Part 1. The Early Metaphysics* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1991); *The Religious Dimensions in the Thought of Giambattista Vico, 1668-1744. Part 2. Language, Law and History* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1992). I have not consulted these volumes (nor the original thesis).

³² See §5.3., esp. §5.3.2. above.

³³ *BR*, 63.

the mystery detailed in the Wisdom Literature of God as *Sophia*, the ‘female’ birth of the Creation as not-God that is also the act of God, and therefore in some sense within God (enfolded in the generation of the *Verbum* [Word/Son of God] and the procession of the *Donum* [Gift/Holy Spirit]).³⁴

Admittedly, here the emphasis here is on creation’s being-in-God (as the grounded in enfolding ground, or as participant in participated) rather than God’s being-in-creation. However, the former seems to imply the latter, especially if ontological participation and “being-enfolded” are understood in terms of divine self-diffusion (of course one might demand more clarity when it comes to God’s “being-in” in respect to creation; the “propriological distinction” offered in chapters 5 and 6 may be helpful in this respect). A similar error in reading Milbank is made by Mayra Rivera Rivera in the same volume (see the next section). Keller’s objection still resounds, however, for there might still be a sense of God’s receptivity which Milbank does not accommodate. Perhaps the creature’s active reception of the divine gift does not, in the end, affect Milbank’s God. This point may well be valid, though it had to be patiently extracted from the misleading ambiguities in Keller’s text.

8.5. Rivera’s Critique of Transcendence

The other contribution to *Interpreting the Postmodern* that responds to Milbank directly and substantially³⁵ is “Radical Transcendence?: Divine and Human Otherness in Radical Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology”. Mayra Rivera Rivera positions herself as follows:

³⁴ *BR*, 208. However, it seems problematic to identify the created product of a divine act with that act. Thus the critique given at §6.4.1. would seem to apply here also. See also Milbank, “Sophiology and Theurgy: The New Theological Horizon”.

³⁵ Besides the responses to Milbank’s rejection of liberation theology. Mary Grey writes that Milbank’s “unnuanced, unsympathetic reading of Rahner ... lies behind Milbank’s rejection of the methodology of liberation theology [in *TST2*]”. Mary Grey, “‘My Yearning Is for Justice’: Moving Beyond Praxis in Feminist Theology” in Ruether and Grau (eds), *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 175-94, here 179. Rivera’s chapter (cited below) also contributes to the debate between Milbank/de Lubac and Rahner/liberation theology (she sides with the latter). There is also a passing reference by Althaus-Reid, who wonders how Milbank can “mention contemporary terms [‘the disappeared’, ‘fortune’] associated with the holocaust of thousands in Latin America with a disrespect arising from the depolitization of the obvious”. She thinks that Milbank’s Christian socialism, “which advocates a transformation of capitalism from within ... by the heart of people and not by structural changes ... is part of a very hierarchical vision, where people at the very top levels (the theological aristocracy)

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like feminist theologians, I am ... mindful of how transcendence has worked to legitimize androcentric and hierarchical mindsets by establishing a metaphysical dualism where [in the words of Ruether] transcendence/immateriality/progress/independence/Man/God are set over against immanence/materiality/stagnation/dependence/Woman/Nature. Might it be possible to rediscover the idea of transcendence, of God's irreducible otherness, without reinscribing the cosmological dualisms that it commonly evokes?³⁶

Rivera attempts such a rediscovery after a somewhat misguided polemic against the transcendence/immanence polarity as it (supposedly) figures in the self-pronouncements of Radical Orthodoxy (she focuses on the work of Milbank and Catherine Pickstock):

Radical orthodoxy is posed as providing an alternative for *immanentist* modernity and its postmodern exacerbation, which those theologians argue, leads only to nihilism ... In premodernity, it is argued, 'everything had its appointed and relative value in relation to a *distant, transcendent* source.'³⁷

The premodern theology and hierarchy were lost in modernity, when 'the world was ... accorded full reality, meaning and value in itself'... The ordering of the world no longer referred to anything outside; this gave way to the birth of humanism and secularism, which Milbank associates ... with 'immanence'. The transcendence that modernity lost is thus imagined as an external source of value associated with vertical dimensionality itself: *highness*. A loss of height, it is assumed, is a loss of transcendence.³⁸

Here Rivera turns to the notion of God's "transcendence" in the work of Catherine Pickstock,³⁹ and somehow arrives at the conclusion that Radical Orthodoxy is against the world and the body. Supposedly, Milbank and Pickstock oppose transcendence against immanence, and place their hopes exclusively on the former in their overcoming of nihilism:

would like to have absolute control of Christianity as a dogmatic construction. This is not far from magical consciousness." Marcella Maria Althaus-Reid, "'A Saint and a Church for Twenty Dollars': Sending Radical Orthodoxy to Ayacucho" in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, 107-118, here, 110. Cf. Milbank, "Politics: Socialism by Grace" in *BR*, 162-86.

³⁶ Mayra Rivera Rivera, "Radical Transcendence? Divine and Human Otherness in Radical Orthodoxy and Liberation Theology" in *Interpreting the Postmodern: Responses to "Radical Orthodoxy"* 119-138, here, 119. Rivera cites Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Towards a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983), 269.

³⁷ Rivera, *ibid.*, 121. Rivera cites *BR*, 194. Rivera's emphasis.

³⁸ Rivera, *ibid.* Rivera's emphasis.

³⁹ Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998).

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Milbank's depiction of transcendence seems to depend on a settled Other: *immanence*. And vice versa [a footnote is inserted here: "Here I am referring to Milbank's sense of the term immanent, which I do not share"]. But the distance between the two poles of the transcendence/immanence dyad tends to infinity ... Whereas many contemporary theologians attempt to hold together the "immanent" as much as the "transcendent" as aspects of God, evoking images of God's presence both *inside* and *outside* of creation, in radical orthodoxy writings we have considered, "immanent", "immanentist" or even "immanence" are frequently used to evoke the *rejection* or *absence* of God—that which denies the beyond.⁴⁰

In short, Rivera claims that the "tendency to selectively 'locate' certain things on either side of an assumed immanent/transcendent line runs through Pickstock's and Milbank's works."⁴¹

Such pronouncements give the impression that Rivera did not read the introduction to *RONT* at all. Consider the following excerpt from that volume:

The central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is 'participation' as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity, because any alternative configuration perforce reserves a territory independent of God. The latter can lead only to nihilism (though in different guises). Participation, however, refuses any reserve of created territory, while allowing finite things their own integrity. Underpinning [the essays in *Radical Orthodoxy*], therefore, is the idea that every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; *otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing*. Although it might seem that to treat of diverse worldly phenomena such as language, knowledge, the body, aesthetic experience, political community, friendship, etc. apart from God is to safeguard their worldliness, in fact, to the contrary, it is to make this worldliness dissolve.⁴²

It is important to note that "worldliness" is not understood here in the religiously *negative* sense (where "worldly" means "ungodly", "immersed in the fleeting pleasures of life" or even "captive to the ruler of this world, the devil") but in a *non-negative* sense; the "worldliness" of the body and friendship and so on simply denotes their happening here and now, in sensuous immediacy, in time and space as we know it. Similarly, it would be a

⁴⁰ Rivera, *ibid.*, 131. Rivera's emphasis.

⁴¹ Rivera, *ibid.*, 133.

⁴² *RONT*, 3. My emphasis.

mistake to conclude from some preacher's polemic against "worldliness" or even living "according to the flesh", that that preacher is *necessarily* "down" on the body and the created world *per se*, because it is entirely possible that the preacher is taking "the world" and "the flesh" in a *very particular aspect* when opposing them. It might not be inconsistent for this religious person to also be completely "for" the body and the world, if these were taken as God's creations, and as good in themselves. In the passage just cited, the safeguarding of worldliness (non-negative sense) is said to have as its condition their being treated as gifts participating *in* God. It is claimed that the world in its here-and-now, sensuous "immanence" (non-negative sense) can only be genuinely affirmed if treated as something "suspended" in God by "participation" rather than as totally independent of God or "immanent" (negative sense)—hence God is said to be "immanent" (a *different* non-negative sense) in all of creation. Against the explicit explanations given in this introduction, and indeed against the tone of the whole of *RONT*, Rivera has concluded, from a careless misreading of the way in which "immanence" is being used (in this work and also in others), that Milbank and Pickstock uphold a purely transcendent God over-against a purely immanent world.

It appears, then, that Rivera *also*, is too hasty in turning distinctions into problematic dualisms in her reading of Milbank (and Pickstock); the texts in question have been bludgeoned using the weapon of "anti-binarism". That Rivera's reading of Milbank's understanding of transcendence is simply false, is demonstrated already by the latter's approval of the "integralism" of de Lubac, and of the "panentheism" of Bulgakov (as explained above). Neither does Rivera consider that Milbank is consistently passionate in his

eschewal of any Kantian relegation of God to a noumenal realm *purely beyond* the phenomena.⁴³

Also worth considering is Radical Orthodoxy's (possibly misdirected) polemic against the theology of Karl Barth. According to the introduction to *RONT*, Barth

tended to assume a positive autonomy for theology, which rendered philosophical concerns a matter of indifference. Yet this itself was to remain captive to a modern—even liberal [read: Kantian]—duality of reason and revelation, and ran the risk of allowing worldly knowledge an unquestioned validity in its own sphere. By comparison with this, radical orthodoxy is 'more mediating, but less accommodating'—since, while it assumes that theology must also speak of something else, it seeks always to recognise a theological difference in speaking ... Whereas Barthianism can tend to the ploddingly exegetical, radical orthodoxy mingles exegesis, cultural reflection and philosophy in a complex but coherently executed collage.⁴⁴

To be “more mediating” (and “less accommodating”) means, in effect, that there is no aspect of human life that cannot contribute to the explication of theological Truth, by being assumed into this discourse, often in surprising ways (though Radical Orthodoxy never recommends *accommodating* any “secular” or “purely immanentist” ideology). This explains the material diversity of the chapter headings of *Radical Orthodoxy*. The particularity of Christian Truth is thought to be like yeast which leavens all manner of foods, rather than manna falling from the sky—though the yeast is still a gift from heaven, and entrusted down the generations.⁴⁵ Milbank refuses to accommodate Christian theology to any “immanentism” (negative sense of immanence) even if that comes with a doctrine of God (say, a non-transcendent “God” emerging through history from below). But this is already to refuse any strict demarcation between the immanent (non-negative sense) and the transcendent—a claim which is continuous with the claim that God's presence in the world is always mediated (by nature, by

⁴³ See §2.9.1. above.

⁴⁴ *RONT*, 3. This reading of Barth is questionable, but will not be addressed here.

⁴⁵ Thanks to Cullan Joyce for the yeast metaphor.

culture, by language, and so on). “Mediation, not accommodation” is thus the “paradox” of Milbank’s Radically Orthodox position, a paradox that none of the relevant contributors to *Interpreting the Postmodern* seems to recognise.⁴⁶

However, more precision is required here. Immanence and transcendence are inseparable for Milbank *on the side of creation*, which everywhere, always and already, is animated and destined by grace, or embedded in “Sophia”. Creation is enfolded in, and thereby called to turn liturgically toward, the God above. But as already shown, for Milbank God “in himself”—adding to the semantic confusion, this is sometimes named the “immanent” Trinity, as opposed to God’s “economic” presence, or God’s involvement in creation and history—God does not come into himself, nor gain his divinity or full actuality, by involvement in creation. So on one hand Milbank denies, against “immanentism”, that any moment of the immanent world has perfection or even exists without being “shot through” with the immanence of the divine. Yet the latter still remains transcendent insofar as God, even when “given”, is *not* creation or any moment thereof, but is eternally and infinitely “higher” than the world or creature in which he comes to dwell (God is not even located on the same plane, in fact—hence “higher” is not *simply* and *strictly* “elsewhere”). For that reason, while it *is* true that creatures have *their* being thanks to their participatory unity with God, it is *not* true that God, inversely, has *his* being-in-himself thanks to his indwelling in creatures. Again, while the “immanent” world is nothing apart from a certain “intermingling” with the divine (and therefore, against “immanentism”, there is no *purely* immanent world), the “immanent” God (God-in-himself, or God taken independently of any involvement with creatures) would still be fully God even if, hypothetically, there had been no divine acts of creation and redemption (there would still be the internal Trinitarian processions).

⁴⁶ For Milbank, mediation *and* accommodation is the method of Karl Rahner and liberation theology; neither mediation *nor* accommodation means theological positivism and Barthianism.

Now, apart from (1) the immanence of God (“God-in-himself”) as opposed to his “economic” involvement in creation, (2) the immanence or indwelling of God in creation, (3) the immanence (sensible presence) of things in the world, and (4) the notion of *pure* immanence (the “immanentism” which for Radical Orthodoxy equals “secularism”), there is in fact a *fifth* sense of immanence that must be dealt with. Here “immanence” is (5) opposed to the “infinite” or the “excessive” taken in a broadly Schellingian sense; “immanence” is the achievement in some thing or system (be it real or notional) of final closure and “totality”.⁴⁷ John Milbank links senses (4) and (5), claiming that totality is avoided, and redemptive life found, *only* through the ever-renewing, intimate presence of *the holiness and height of the immutable God*.⁴⁸ This contrasts with the approach of Jean-Luc Nancy, who attempts to overcome “totality” with Schelling and Heidegger, while embracing atheism—and therefore “immanence” in sense (4).⁴⁹

In her critique of Radical Orthodoxy’s appeal to “transcendence”, Rivera attempts to retrieve the notion of “excess”—against (5) totalising “closure”—while eschewing the notion of a vertically transcendent God—thus embracing (4), though not in the explicitly atheistic fashion of Nancy and others. Here she draws upon the work of Ignacio Ellacuría.⁵⁰ The latter attributes to “pernicious philosophical influences” the fact that transcendence has been identified with *separateness*, which in turn leads to the assumption that “historical transcendence is separate from history.” By contrast, he argues that it is possible

⁴⁷ See Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1979).

⁴⁸ See §2.6., esp. §2.6.3. and §2.7. above.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000); *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, trans. Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simon Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

⁵⁰ Ignacio Ellacuría, “The Historicity of Christian Salvation”, in Ignacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino (eds), *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1993).

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to see transcendence as something that transcends in and not as something that transcends *away* from; as something that physically impels to more, but not by taking out of; as something that *pushes* forward, but at the same time *retains*.⁵¹

Whatever Ellacuría *himself* means by “separateness” here—though it does not appear that Rivera distorts Ellacuría’s thought—it is clear that Rivera is using these texts to support both (i) an either-or alternative between transcendence-*above*-creation and transcendence-working-*within*-creation, and (ii) the rejection of the former in favour of the latter. But from the perspective of Milbank, transcendence-as-height is not *strict* and *pure* separation, since God and creation are not separated locally, as if they occupied extremes in the same univocal plane of being. To be sure, for Milbank God is God absolutely, by virtue of himself, independently of any relation to creation (even the relation of otherness). Yet there can be no ontological domain fully “outside” God in which the world might exist; the real world is not God, is not even a moment of God, but it is nothing apart from its participatory “suspension” in God. With the latter claim precisely—the claim about universal *methexis*—it is denied, against Rivera, that transcendence-as-height entails strict and pure separation.

To avoid confusion, though, it should be remembered that in *another* sense it can be said that there *is* a strict and pure separation of God, insofar as God is fully God without relation to anything but God; the two claims are not incompatible (or at least do not appear to be at the level of analysis attempted here). In sum, if it is said (a) that God is fully and eternally God independently of any relation to creation, that is *not* yet to say (b) that creation exists independently of every relation to God, including the (for Milbank, *constitutive*) relation of *methexis*, or that creation ever exists without being intimately enfolded in the divine. Perhaps Rivera and Ellacuría, and others like Grau and Keller, assume mistakenly that (a) entails (b). This might explain the ease with which it is claimed, problematically, that a traditionally

⁵¹ Ellacuría, *ibid.*, 254. Cited in Rivera, *ibid.*, 134. Rivera’s emphasis.

transcendent God such as Milbank's, is necessarily a God who is *purely* transcendent, One abiding *strictly on the "other side"* of the created world—and that *instead* of this idea, we should side with transcendence-in. With this either-or as her theological horizon, along with the other problematic assumptions about hierarchy, no wonder any intervention by a traditionally transcendent God, in line with "the (more phallic) imagery of something 'breaking in' from the 'outside'"⁵² appears to Rivera as, well, *rape*.⁵³

8.6. The Repetition of Christ

Also questionable is Keller's response to a Christological claim of Milbank's in *BR*. Keller asks whether Milbank's appeal to "the incarnation of the Logos, as the return of humanity to the Father"⁵⁴ might allow for reciprocity between God and the world. She decides that with this move Milbank in fact devalues creation in favour of "the wintry abstraction" of the inner workings of the Trinity:

The Logos serves here as a mere Athanasian stand-in for humanity, rather than as a Christological mediation of real human interrelatedness with said 'Father'. Relationality is thus reduced or absorbed into the circularity by which the incarnation of the second Person eternally returns to the first Person of God.⁵⁵

What exactly are the two positions juxtaposed here? The objection to "reducing" or "absorbing" human relationality⁵⁶ into the circularity" of the invisible Trinity via the Logos, suggests an opposition between (i) divine self-relation (Trinitarian "circularity") and (ii) genuine relation between humanity (or creation in general) and God. Keller's appears to be

⁵² Rivera, *ibid.*, 136

⁵³ "While radical orthodoxy's descriptions of creatures emphasize that their value derives from their transcendent source, Ellacuría insists upon a certain innate worth, even divinity, in their finitude. Rather than placing the value of human life outside of it, in something to which one may or may not relate or respond, Ellacuría places the value of human life *in* human life." Rivera, *ibid.*, 134. Rivera's emphasis. She cites Ellacuría, *ibid.*, 276. See chapter 5 above for a response to this type of view (I argue that this opposition can be refused by distinguishing different senses of "in").

⁵⁴ *BR*, 160. Cited in Keller, "Is That All?", 32.

⁵⁵ Keller, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ It is not entirely clear who or what the other term of such relationality is supposed to be—other human persons, God, or both at once via Christ?

claiming the following, then: since Milbank chooses (i) as the horizon of his Christology, the latter cannot possibly accommodate (ii). That is, the relation between humanity and God cannot possibly be an extension of, or participation in, the Triune God's inner self-relation(s). Further support for this reading is given by Keller's description of Milbank's Christology as one that refers to a "wintry abstraction".

In fact there may be *two* distinct moves made by Keller in this passage. Note that the second sentence does not affirm that relationality is reduced or absorbed into the *interrelatedness* between the incarnate second Person and the first Person of God. Rather, it affirms that relationality is absorbed into a divine *circularity* (possibly the *self-return* of the first divine Person, as mediated by the return of the incarnate second Person). Perhaps Keller is claiming that (1) divine "circularity", or the Father's mediated self-return, does not represent genuine "interrelatedness" between Father and Son, and *also* that (2) the concrete and "warm" relation between humanity and God cannot possibly be an extension of, or participation in, the "wintry abstraction" of the Triune God's inner self-relation(s). In any case, it is the second claim that is the object of critique below.⁵⁷

If Keller *does* subscribe to (2), then it would seem that she thinks that the only way to affirm the *intrinsic* dignity and lovability of human persons, in a Christian context at least, is by saying that humanity returns to and is received by the "Father", in a direct, unmediated, unassumed fashion (and this against key passages in John⁵⁸). In that case, Keller's polemic imposes a reading of personal identity as *unmediated* in one respect; this respect proves crucial, as explained shortly. This reading of personal identity can be confronted with an

⁵⁷ Although relevant, Hegel's notion of God is not addressed here. In the following, I draw upon Hegel's understanding of the universal. For relevant citations, and Milbank's relation to Hegel's theology, see notes 40-44 and related text in chapter 6 above.

⁵⁸ "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through me." John 4:6. "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away ... Make your home in me, as I make mine in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, but must remain part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me ... cut off from me you can do nothing ..." John 15:1-6. Jerusalem Bible.

alternative theo-logic, as follows: Christ’s identity, while historically concrete (and now risen), does not simply stand over-against human identities but is a (concrete) universal, and therefore subject to mediation, or in other words, non-identical repetition, by human creatures (and indeed by all creation). In short, human persons participate in the unique identity of Christ, and in that way have their own unique identities—as “paradoxical” as that might sound.

Keller’s *non*-paradoxical way of opposing the Logos and the human individual is shown in the following passage (particularly the second sentence):

[H]ow can we read the “absolute creative power of the Father” as anything but the ultimate closure of reciprocity? Absolute creative power, as pure activity, pure act, brooks no space in the divine in which we—we, not just our humanness platonically ‘assumed’ by the logos—might be received.⁵⁹

In light of the alternative theo-logic just outlined, one can offer the following response. To pit “we”—by which Keller means the *genuine* we, who we *really* are—against “our humanness platonically ‘assumed’ by the logos”—is to oppose the universal to the individual unnecessarily, or else to fail to think the Logos as an all-embracing, repeatable universal at all. On the side of God, such an opposition determines in advance that the incarnation and return of the Son could have no room for genuine mediation/repetition by created human persons. Once this denial is made, of course, Milbank’s appeal to the return of the Son to the Father appears to involve a “wintry abstraction”. On the side of creation, this is to decide in advance that the human person could only have intrinsic being and goodness if these were realised and enacted *independently* of Christ’s sovereign capitulation. Hence Keller does not

⁵⁹ Keller, *ibid.*, 33. Keller’s emphasis. She cites *BR*, 160.

allow that a human person might have “being-in-itself” by virtue of “being-in-Another”.⁶⁰ Her understanding of the Incarnation apparently *ends* by affirming that the Son of God assumed an individual human nature. That is, it seems Keller does not proceed to the additional mystery, that this unique divine-human “individual” is repeated in/as other human persons (without this undoing the primacy of the historical man Jesus⁶¹) such that the Christ is at once individual *and* universal.

8.7. Interpreting Reciprocity

What emerges into view out of this critique of Keller’s reading of Milbank, is a conflict between diverse “logics” of reciprocity, as considered from the side of creation offering itself to God.⁶² Despite her gestures toward panentheism,⁶³ Keller places creation or humanity in a position “outside” God, as it were, so that creation is able to contribute something *other* than God, some positivity unassumed *by* God (in Christ), *to* God. On this picture, God receives and is affected by a “naked” creation. In other words, creation is presentable to God, and is presented to God, without Christological mediation. By contrast, Milbank’s theology draws on the tradition for which the God-world relation is read in terms of cosmic liturgy, as centred and mediated in Christ eucharistically.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ I am referring to a being-in-Christ that is universal and ontological, and which precedes the human person’s free activity and sanctification (one might understand the latter to represent a more perfect being-in-Christ).

⁶¹ See Frederick Christian Bauerschmidt, “The Word Made Speculative? John Milbank’s Christological Poetics”, *Modern Theology* 15 (1999), 417–432, esp. 423–26, for the objection that Milbank so emphasises the non-identical repetition of Christ in the present and in the Church, that the historical details of the life of Jesus of Nazareth are undervalued or ignored. Cf. Milbank, “A Christological Poetics”; “The Name of Jesus” in *The Word Made Strange*, 145–69.

⁶² Thus I prescind from the contrast between divine mutability (Keller) and immutability (Milbank), at least for now.

⁶³ “It is only through this transcosmic panentheism that the reciprocities of all creatures, in the exchange of the breath of life and all its gifts, finds its proper theological context.” Keller, *ibid.*, 31–32.

⁶⁴ Maximus the Confessor comes to mind in particular. See the references to liturgy in *BR*, x and “The Gift and the Mirror”. For the “liturgical turn” in contemporary theology see Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998). On the sacramentality of creation see Denys Turner, *Faith, Reason and the Existence of God* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 224–25.

To be sure, Milbank affirms that creation is distinct from God, notwithstanding its “inherent nothingness” (i.e., its radical dependence on God’s sustaining activity).⁶⁵ For this “Radically Orthodox” theologian, the Trinity does not depend on any relation to creation or history for completion in being:

Žižek ... does not realize that the idea that the Father is the Father only in generating the Son through the procession of the Spirit is not first and foremost concerned with the ‘seriousness’ of a divine relationship to history ... [nor does it mean that] the Father is the Father only as the Father of the incarnate Jesus Christ.⁶⁶

So there is a sense in which, for Milbank, something *other* than God returns to God and is presented to God liturgically. However, the horizon, as it were, of the God-world relation, is for Milbank the face-to-face between God the Father and God the Son.⁶⁷ Creation is assumed in Christ so as to be “taken along” with the Son toward the Father; the Trinitarian relations are made open for participation, extended gratuitously into finitude. Hence, genuine encounter and “exchange” between creation and God is always a finitely modulated repetition in God (the Spirit) of the eternal reciprocity between God (the Father) and God (the Son). If creation is “other” to God (since God is already fully God apart from creation), this otherness is nevertheless embedded, and eucharistically offered, within the Son’s otherness to the Father in the Trinity, where this latter otherness has now been “extended” to incorporate creation, thanks to the incarnation.

This Christological reading of otherness is what is lacking from Keller’s theology, averse as she is to what she assumes to be the “wintry abstraction” of God’s self-return in the Word (made flesh). As seen above, this assumption seems to follow from a certain prejudice or ambivalence about mediation—Keller opposes God (or Christ) and the individual creature as

⁶⁵ See §5.2.3. above.

⁶⁶ Milbank, “The Double Glory”, 186.

⁶⁷ See notes 34 and 54 above.

if they were *simply* two individuals. The Logos is assumed to be non-mediabile relative to the created individual; the latter is thought to possess its integrity and worth immediately, independently of any assumption in Christ, as if this were the only way to locate being and goodness genuinely *in* the creature. Where Milbank's Christological reading of creation's otherness to God relates Christ *qua* universal to individual creatures, Keller's para-Christological reading seems only to relate Christ *qua individual* to individual creatures. And this is crucial, *for the reciprocity between (concrete) universal and (assumed) individual displays a different logic to the reciprocity that might occur between two merely human individuals where neither is essentially the ground and horizon into which the other is inserted ontologically* (more on this in the next section). One problem with Keller's critique of Milbank—her claim that Milbank does not apply his principle of reciprocity radically enough—is therefore her assumption that the condition of reciprocity for the democratic, non-hierarchical relation that holds between two created individuals, should also be the condition for genuine reciprocity between God (or Christ) and the created individual (and by extension, between God and all creation).

8.8. The Mediation of Identity: Vertical and Horizontal

According to the critique offered above, between Milbank and Keller there is a stark contrast in how the individual creature is thought to be “intrinsically good”, and thus a fitting recipient *for* God's gift of love, as well as a fitting gift to present *to* God. On (this reading of) Milbank's account, the goodness of the human person is a function of his/her repetition of Christ, and so the “being-in-another” of personal identity and worth is not seen to be in conflict with the person's “being-in-itself”. That is, the human person's being-in-itself—his/her possession of “intrinsic” being and worth—is affirmed to hold true *insofar as* the person exists in-Another (i.e., in Christ). By contrast, Keller holds a *non-paradoxical* view of the human person's dignity. *More precisely*, Keller appears to be *ambivalent* about the

paradox of “being-in-itself-insofar-as-in-another.” If this paradox is refused in the vertical and Christological dimension, it is affirmed in the horizontal direction:

[Milbank’s] recognition of a root sociality of interdependence is a step in the direction of recognizing the constitutive—ontological?—reciprocity of all subjects, as it is manifest and performed in the exchange of gifts.⁶⁸

Keller writes of the importance of overcoming the “ousiological” and “Cartesian” (i.e., non-mediated) understandings of identity, in favour of radical reciprocity and mutual participation (i.e., the mediation of identity):

[T]he deconstruction [of an ousiologically framed theology] will be a long and delicate operation, precisely in its radicality. To appreciate that participation is not just in ideas but also in each other and therefore in God ... This sense of participation draws on alternative Platonic traditions, such as that of Nicholas of Cusa, whose articulation the principle for radical relationalism in theology cannot be surpassed: ‘therefore to say that “each thing is in each thing” is not other than to say that “through all things God is in all things” and that “through all things all are in God.”’ It is only through this transcosmic panentheism that the reciprocities of all creatures, in the exchange of the breath of life and all its gifts, finds its proper theological context.⁶⁹

One wonders whether Keller’s habitually suspicious feminism leads her to assert that the only way to think of a *vertical* or *hierarchical* relation is in terms of one principle “dominating” and working over-against another (this motif being a typical “Other” or “enemy” of much feminist theology)—whereas a vertical relation can also be thought more subtly as above, in terms of the harmonious (i.e. other-releasing) mediation/repetition of a (concrete) universal. Keller does not consider whether the idea of being-genuinely-oneself-by-being-in-another (or others) might be applied to the human creature’s relation to Christ or God, thereby saving this “vertical” relation from instantiating divine “dominance” and/or the creature’s disappearance

⁶⁸ Keller, *ibid.*, 21.

⁶⁹ Keller, *ibid.*, 31-32.

and devaluation (“absorption or reduction”). Perhaps it is by a dogmatic assertion of the essentially oppressive character of *every* vertical/hierarchical relation, that feminism muscles its way onto the intellectual scene, promising a liberating “way forward”. If there is any truth to this *counter*-hermeneutic of suspicion, then it is possible that Keller “needs” to configure and position the “vertical” relation to God in this way, so as to refuse it in a gesture of redemption. But in any case, this refusal represents a refusal of the paradox of mediation, or being-in-itself-by-being-in-another, against her *acceptance* of this principle in the “horizontal” direction. Keller accuses Milbank of not thinking the principle of reciprocity radically enough. But one might ask whether *Keller* is radical and consistent in thinking the principle of *mediation*, without which “ecstatic reciprocity” would seem to come to nothing.

For once the paradox of mediation is refused in the vertical dimension, a difficulty arises when it comes to thinking the “ecstatic” relationality between human persons. The notion that a single, merely human other forms the ground and horizon of a human person’s existence and worth, seems highly problematic. Suppose, for example, that it were thought that Wendy had no identity or worth other than by mediating or repeating (non-identically) the being of this one other human person, Peter. This would be to configure the relation between Peter and Wendy as that between a (concrete) universal and a mediating particular. The problem here is not that this relation is the inverse of what it should be (as if *Wendy* were the repeatable universal instead), but that a merely human person is forced into a role which can only be assumed from a transcendent (and so all the more intimately involved) position—the position that Milbank would ascribe uniquely to Christ. It might be appropriate to think of human persons as being “repeatable” in some *weak* sense (e.g., Wendy is deeply impressed, influenced and inspired by Peter’s unique personality, and expresses this in her own way). But to say, for instance, that Peter (or Wendy) is in fact the selfsame spirit at work and manifest (if “anonymously”) in *all* human desire, identity and expression, is to ascribe

divinity falsely to Peter (or Wendy). Peter is just Peter; Wendy is only Wendy. Even if called to eternal life and “divinised” union with God, no mere human is an ontologically grounding, repeatable universal. For Christians, however, Jesus of Nazareth is not *simply* the man Jesus—He is *Christ* (and this without being any less the man Jesus).

Presumably, Keller, would refuse every idolising hierarchical relation between any two merely human persons, and rightly so. But in the absence of a Christological, vertical relation between particular creature and mediated/repeatable universal, one which radically binds each created human person to Christ, it appears no longer possible to uphold radically and consistently the paradox of being-in-oneself-by-being-in-another. The subjects that are involved in (non-idolising) horizontal reciprocity must after all be subjects that exist *in themselves prior* to their being-in-others, inasmuch as none of these others is Christ exactly. According to Keller, “[w]hether Milbank ... breaks out of the trap of the substantial subject, remains to be seen.”⁷⁰ But it is now clear that Milbank is *uniquely able* to undo the “substantial subject”, using the very Christological motif rejected by Keller.⁷¹

8.9. The Gift of Ruling

If this critique is correct, then Keller’s failure to distinguish between unmediated, individual being on one hand, and participable/mediated, (concretely) universal being on the other, forces her to read Milbank’s reference to God’s sovereign power as the idea of unmediated force working over-against another unilaterally. As already indicated, Keller asks how we might read “the absolute creative power of the Father” (Milbank’s phrase⁷²) as “anything but

⁷⁰ Keller, *ibid.*, 21.

⁷¹ See also Milbank, “The Force of Identity” in *The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 194-217, for his attempt to overcome a strict metaphysics of substance.

⁷² *BR*, 160.

the ultimate closure of reciprocity?”⁷³ She appears to take “absolute” power to mean the *exclusive* possession of (an unlimited degree of) power, whereas Milbank means nothing of the sort. She fails to notice that for Milbank, true “ruling” is, by nature, a gift to be shared—that true sovereignty is the sharing of sovereignty.⁷⁴ Thus, the Father’s absolute creative power is none other than his infinite love, which works not over-against others but through and with them. This requires us to appreciate that what comes from and remains “proper” to the Father, can at the same time become “proper” to (in the sense of working in and through) another.⁷⁵ It is not necessarily true, then, that “Absolute creative power, as pure activity, pure act, brooks no space in the divine in which we ... might be received”.⁷⁶

The inaccuracy of this statement is compounded by the fact that power and act are *not* precisely the same. Milbank’s thought on the relation between *actus* and *virtus* in God are quite subtle; he intends to allow for a certain “inexhaustibility” in God’s (mediated) expressivity, one that requires, against Aquinas, that *virtus* does not collapse identically into *actus*.⁷⁷ Neither does Keller consider that Milbank eschews any sort of “command theory”, such as the one Karl Barth uses in his reading of the relation between Father and Son, and between God and creature. For Milbank, to comport oneself to another through “command”, is to relate to the one commanded as to something naturally unreceptive—something needing to be brought into right order by unilateral intervention, rather than by harmonious co-operation, pacific *consensus*.⁷⁸

⁷³ Keller, *ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁴ See, e.g., Milbank, “The Gift of Ruling: Secularization and Political Authority”, *New Blackfriars* 85 (2004), 212-38.

⁷⁵ See chapters 5 and 6.

⁷⁶ Keller, *ibid.*, 33.

⁷⁷ See §7.5. above.

⁷⁸ See Chris K. Huebner, “Can a Gift Be Commanded? Theological Ethics without Theory by Way of Barth, Milbank and Yoder”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 53 (2000), 472-489. See also *BR*, 106-9.

8.10. The Limits of “Interdependence”

Keller would probably object to the claim made above (that without the Christological paradox of being-in-oneself-by-being-in-Another, one is forced to admit that those involved in horizontal reciprocity must be subjects that exist *in themselves prior* to their being-in-others, inasmuch as none of these others is Christ exactly) by returning to her proposal of an “alternative subjectivity, in which subjects arise moment to moment as events of inter-becoming.”⁷⁹ On this view, there is no problematically hierarchical or idolising relation between human persons, just because human subjects have their being (a) through time together, in *inter*-dependence, rather than (b) by some unilateral influence that one exerts upon another. However, it is hard to see how interdependence might work at a radical level and in the way that Keller requires.

Suppose there are two persons, *A* and *B*, who come into being by a certain reciprocal giving and receiving of being (one might read this in terms of mutual recognition,⁸⁰ and/or in terms of gift-exchange, or the sharing of love). Suppose also that neither *A* nor *B* has “personal being” (however this might be understood) prior to their giving and receiving of personal being, and for the sake of simplicity, that this reciprocity does not involve exchange/encounter with some third person. On this picture, there is a certain emergence from non-being to personal being in *A*, and also in *B*, where these emergences occur through time, incipiently and interdependently (perhaps as two moments or aspects of the one “co-emergence”). It can now be asked, what is the nature of the non-being that precedes personal being? Is it *absolute* non-being? Do *A* and *B* generate each other *ex nihilo*? Surely not—how could two non-existing principles possibly bring each other into being simultaneously? Even

⁷⁹ Keller, *ibid.*, 33-34.

⁸⁰ See §3.2.3. above.

to suppose that one human person brings another human person into being from nothing at all is highly problematic. Suppose, then, that the non-being in question is *non*-absolute—that it is the potentiality of a certain subject for personal being. However, not just anything is capable of becoming a person. For example rocks, ferns and worms do not become persons, not matter how much one might actively love them. The most reasonable and straight-forward response is to say that human *beings* are the sort of beings that are fit to become *persons*—or to become persons *more fully*, realising their personhood through time and with others (here it is not necessary to define the essential features of human being, or those of personhood).

Now what is witnessed in life is the gradual actualisation of *individual potential* in human beings, albeit in a social context. Personal being is not simply imposed from without, but rather emerges wondrously into expression from a vital and creative centre within, if certain enabling conditions prevail. But who (besides God) has ever generated in another person that mysteriously interior *virtuality* from which arises “personal being” in the sense of the expressive *actuality* of personhood? The fact that parents are typically surprised (happily, or unhappily) by the fresh and unique expressions of personality in their children, indicates that human parents do not generate the interior virtuality of their children in an absolute sense.⁸¹ And is not respect for the other based upon the recognition of the “otherness” of the other—the fact that no mere mortal could have generated this “divine spark” or wellspring of potential in the other, though this denial might not be made explicitly?⁸²

Thus it would seem that genuinely ethical reciprocity involves the humble recognition of the other as, in essence, a gift and mystery beyond anyone’s generative ability (except God’s).

⁸¹ One might object that in procreation parents give their child its genes, and that this is enough to account for the unique personality of the child. However, it is enough thing altogether to say that one or both parents give forth (“ek-spire”) their own life, such that the generated child is either (a) consubstantial (“one being”) with its parents, or (b) made in their image and likeness.

⁸² Just as it is not necessary to form the judgement, “Why, Sarah is not a man-made instrument!” in order to actively recognise Sarah as a person.

One might object that genuine recognition can occur without the formation of (inchoate) judgements about the origin of the (interiority) of the other, whether affirmative (“___ is made in the image of God”) or negative (“___ could not have been made by another human being”). The important point, however, is the following. Ethical comportment does not seem compatible with a comportment that reduces the other—particularly his/her virtual interiority or “depth”—to something in the horizon of humanly caused effects. In other words, it would seem that ethical comportment is in essence a *letting-be* of the other—the offering of a receptive presence, or opening of a welcoming space, which allows the other to come into expression (to “speak”) responsively yet spontaneously, from an untouchable and unpredictable interior origin.

One would expect that a feminist such as Catherine Keller would embrace this vision wholly—and therefore to qualify her statements on “inter-becoming” in (something close to) the following fashion. We do not give each other our respectively unique interiorities⁸³; we simply open between us the space and time in which our interiority is allowed to be discovered and interpreted anew, together—the interiority of one touching and inciting the other into self-expression, touching by being touched, inciting by being incited.

If “inter-becoming” is understood in terms of mutual letting-be or “releasement” as above, then it is denied that human subjects have being *in* each other at a fundamental level; on this view, persons simply open for each other the dialogical space in which *independently pre-existing* virtual being is discovered, expressed and interpreted through time. In short, on this view *virtual* personal being exists *independently* of human others in each case, while *expressively actual* personal being occurs *interdependently* (and even *as* interdependence). The point to be made in this section, then, is as follows. The Christological reading of

⁸³ “Interiority” in the sense of origin or virtuality, not affectivity (though this is certainly involved).

personal identity offered above prevents the fundamental separateness of personal being in the “horizontal” dimension from amounting to a problematically *absolute* separateness—“atomic” virtuality curved upon itself, seeking only its own expression and fulfilment (see §3.3). For it is possible to combine “horizontal” separateness with Christological inherence or embeddedness. When speaking of virtual being, rather than actual or expressive being, the paradox of being-oneself-by-being-in-another is *not* applied between human persons (for no human person is the ground and horizon of another), while it *is* applied to the human person in relation to Christ. This seems a promising way of overcoming the egoism of a “substantial subject”—for each human person is understood to be animated by the same communicable divine form or virtuality, by virtue of Christ’s incarnation and capitulation of creation—while also respecting the separateness and mystery of distinct persons in regard to each other. Arguably, if separate human persons did not each abide in and repeat (differently) the Same, there could be no harmonious “inter-becoming”; each interiority would be that of merely atomic virtuality seeking its own singular expression, without relational openness or concern for the other.

8.11. Conclusion

The readings offered in *Interpreting the Postmodern*, of Milbank’s understanding of divine transcendence, are flawed in several respects. For Milbank, creation does not have its being “outside” of God, nor is there any domain of human culture and creativity that does not participate in the divine Word and Art. Moreover, for Milbank, human reception of the supernatural occurs in the “middle voice”, as *poesis* (both these points involve the idea of plural possession). The associated polemics against Milbank are therefore largely misdirected. Milbank’s appeal to Christological “paradox”, whereby human persons have their being by being-in-Another, promises to accommodate both the relationality and the separateness of human persons, in a way that Keller is unable to. For Keller refuses this

paradox and the idea of plural possession that supports it, opposing the supposedly genuine, integral “we” to the “we” assumed by the Logos. However, the essence of Catherine Keller’s particular objection to Milbank’s theology still stands: an immutable God may well be a purely unilateral giver in respect to creation, and this may be a problem. It remains to be seen whether appealing to “virtuality” and “event” as Milbank does in his understanding of divine act, as well as the Christological “revision” of eternal divine being, would be an adequate response to this objection.⁸⁴

⁸⁴ Similar questions are posed in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

9. Conclusion

Inasmuch as John Milbank's theo-ontology is characterised by the eschewal of a "nominalistic" understanding of individuals in favour of a view which takes things and persons to be intrinsically relational, and a consistent appeal to "gift" and "participation" in support of this relational view, it would seem that his theology calls for a thought of *communicable virtus*. Such is the move made in the first stage of the overall argument above, (a move followed in chapters 3 to 5, and prepared for in chapter 2). To simply affirm the existence and expression of *merely individual* potential would arguably amount to accepting the nominalism that Milbank rejects. Yet gesturing in favour of "realism" in respect to universals, as Milbank does, is insufficient in this regard. For there are certainly versions of such "realism" that are consistent with the denial that universals have any real being and force in themselves. The ontology of the communicable proposed here, as supported by the propriological distinction in stage two of the overall argument (chapters 5 to 7) promises to make up for this lacuna in Milbank's thought.

In the light of this distinction, it can be coherently argued that some principle—that which is participated in, and/or that which is shared as gift—is able to be the Same inasmuch as it has just one *metaphysical* subject, while also being given to many *expressive* subjects. In this way one might claim that the plural expression/mediation of self-Same Gift is the condition for Milbank's "asymmetrical reciprocity" in gift-exchange. Distinguishing between an ontic/metaphysical and a dynamical/expressive sense of "being-in" also enables one to bring to light the specific features of Milbank's ontology of participation, particularly as that actually *departs* from the metaphysics of Aquinas, and also respond to the claim that this ontology of participation does not give creatures intrinsic power, being and goodness.

However, the ontology offered in this thesis is merely an adumbration, and calls for development in a number of areas. In respect to *participation*, it is unclear how one might distinguish adequately between (i) a participation in God (perhaps via Christ) that is ontological and universal, and (ii) a participation reserved for the “redeemed” or the “sanctified” (the Dutch Reformed objection). Moreover, it would seem that appealing to the self-diffusive sense of ontological participation is not adequate for an ontology of creation—at least not if it is agreed that creatures have proper natures which, as finite, are not reducible to the repetition or indwelling of divine form. It is not clear how one might synthesise the claim that creatures have created ontic forms, with the claim that creatures have their being by bearing divine form as dynamical subjects. Another problem is how to account for the difference between personal and non-personal mediation/expression of divine form. This would require an account of freedom, as well as an account of how the divine is expressed in non-human creatures. Here it may well be fruitful consulting the Palamite account of divine “energies” which Milbank dismisses, as well as the details of Bulgakov’s cosmology.

In respect to *virtuality*, it would be useful to compare this account with recent vitalisms, and to strengthen the rather vague notion of “expression” with a *phenomenology* of expression. In respect to the *communicable*, it is still not fully clear what sense should be given to the claim that the Same is really one (not merely intentionally one, as *genus* is for Aristotle). Who or what, for example, is the metaphysical subject of the communicable divine form (assuming there is one)? Should one make the subject of the communicable a singular *Person*, say, God the Father (and open oneself to the objection of “modalism”)? Or should this rather be said to be the one divine Being or Substance (this has its own problems)? And are there *created* communicables?

In respect to *gift*, more attention needs to be given to gratuity (and gratitude, its correlate), and also to the different expressions of love. It is not clear how love of neighbour might be

accounted for in terms of the mediation of communicable Gift (if at all). The task of understanding the dynamics of gift-exchange requires more attention to the phenomena of call and response. A more sustained analysis of the logics of “aporia”, “paradox” and “dialectic” is also called for, given that these are what separate the exchangist and unilateralist accounts of the gift. There is also the question of whether divine immutability is compatible with reciprocity/gift-exchange between God and creation.

Finally, it should be noted that Mibank’s theo-ontology is still developing. Further research is needed on other aspects of Milbank’s developing account of Being and *methexis*, such as his thoughts on the infinite and on hierarchy.

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¹ For earlier essays by Milbank not cited here, see the bibliography on "Radical Orthodoxy" provided at www.calvin.edu/~jks4/ro/robib.pdf. The Stanton lectures recently given by Milbank (accessible at www.theologyphilosophycentre.co.uk along with a few other unpublished papers of his) were not consulted for this thesis either.

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